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In Mio's Youth

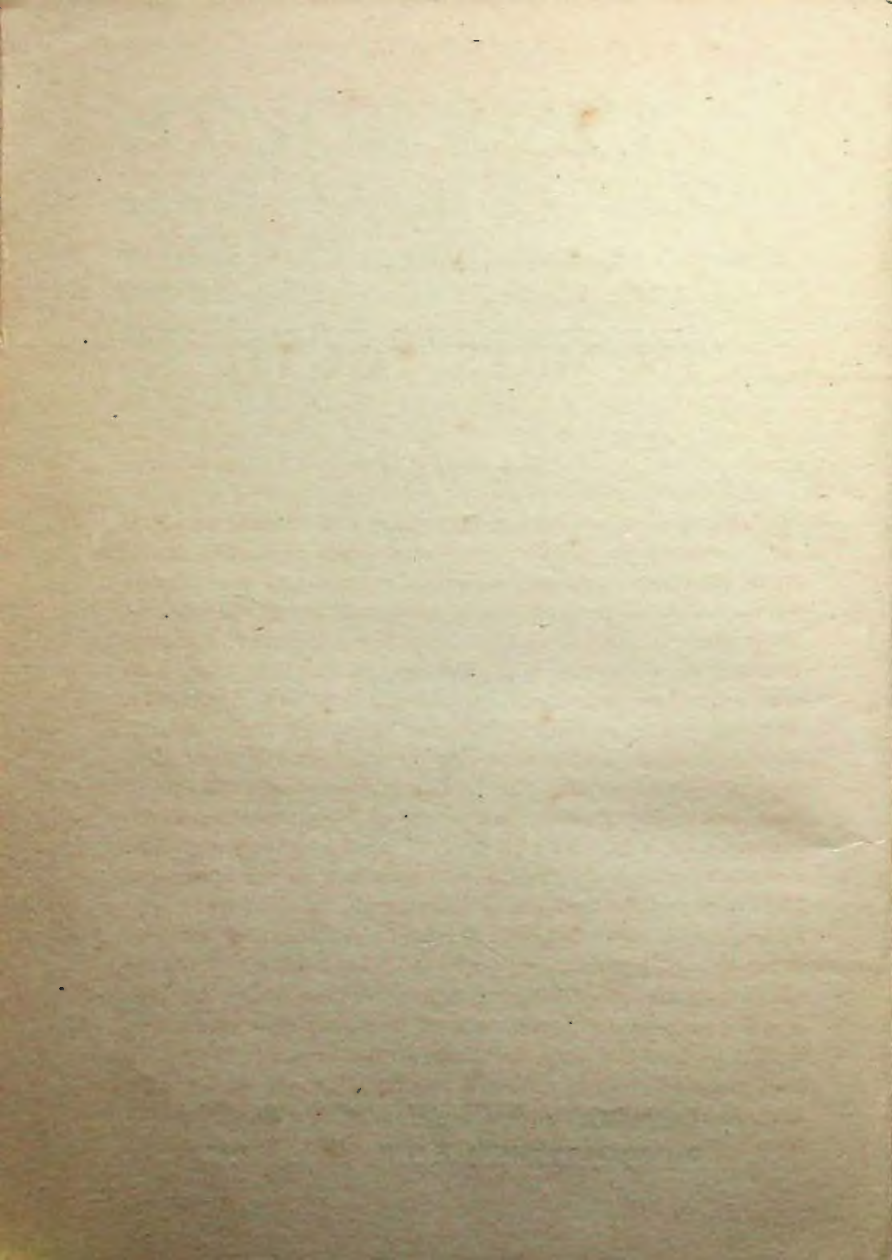
IN MIO'S YOUTH

A Novel : : By Jane Barlow

Author of "Kerrigan's Quality," "The Founding of Fortunes," "The Mockers," "Strangers at Lisconnell," etc.



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IN MIO'S YOUTH

CHAPTER I

FOR ten years Denis Helveran and Hermione Quin waited to acquire resources such as would make their marriage appear reasonably prudent, and for a whole year afterwards they congratulated themselves upon the results. Then one cloudless October morning Denis very suddenly died, and on the next day his wife was gone too, leaving their daughter a few hours old. We may take as said on the occasion by their family, friends and acquaintances, all the customary platitudes, especially one to the effect that it was a pity the baby had lived—for its own sake, few of them omitted scrupulously to add. The pity of it was most strongly felt, if not expressed, by the people upon whom the charge of this regrettable survivor threatened to devolve. Her father's few near kinsfolk being obviously unavailable, everything pointed to her mother's eldest brother Charlie Quin as the appropriate guardian, since he had a wife, and so many children of his own that one more would be neither here nor there in his house. It is true that poor Hermione's second brother Bernard had a wife also, having lately married a widow with a four-year-old Hugh Maxwell of her own. But their circumstances

were quite unlike those of the Charlie Quins, settled on the ancestral estate, beneath a roof which gave permanent, however leaky, shelter. For the Bernard Quins were on the point of setting out to the Argentine, in hopes of burnishing their far from brilliant fortunes, an expedition which a small infant clearly could not join.

"Evidently we must either put it out to nurse somehow, or take it ourselves," Charlie said, still admitting doubts, as he talked the matter over with Bernard, his co-trustee. Bernard ignored alternatives.

"That will be far the best possible arrangement," he said promptly. "That Ethel should have the care of the child is just what poor Mina would have wished," he declared with conviction, almost in the tone of one generously renouncing a disputable bequest. Ethel was Charlie's wife; and Charlie well knew that, if so, her wishes and the subject were quite different from poor Hermione's. Only a few minutes before, indeed, she had been lamenting herself to him over the prospect. Nor was she groundlessly aggrieved. Here were her youngest children grown so big that she had hoped soon to reduce her expensive and troublesome nursery establishment, and be freer from those claims on her time and attention, of which she had the matronly intolerance surprising rather often to childless people; and now all her plans she foresaw upset and deferred for a term of years by the interloping of this superfluous baby. A dear little thing, she confessed, when in the presence of its darkly down-covered head and inscrutable smiles; neither would it prove any pecuniary burden, as poor Denis had sufficiently provided for his never-seen daughter. The immediate trouble was what Mrs. Charlie Quin considered, and the knowledge that everybody expected her to take it made her all the more loth. Martyrdom looks the less prepossessing when your neighbours

view it as a matter of course, or even say pleasantly : "How nice for you!" Then a chance of escape unexpectedly appeared.

The Helverans' tragedy had happened at Battersea, and the mournful tidings brought thither a little concourse of relations. As the Bernard Quins had come to London for their embarkation, they were almost on the spot, like Denis's elderly great-aunts, the Misses Peyton, of South Kensington; but the Charlie Quins travelled over from the far west of Ireland. During the settlement of Denis's affairs these people met occasionally at the young couple's late residence, small and pretty, where the fresh "decorations" and wedding-presents had still worn nearly their newest gloss when cast aside so soon; and one afternoon, when this party chanced to be assembled there, Mrs. Armitage arrived.

She was a widow, distantly related to the Helverans, and in her younger days greatly attached to Denis's parents, who had befriended her somewhat forlorn girlhood. It had ended in a marriage by which everybody rightly considered her to have done well for herself; but her happiness was cut even shorter than that of Denis and Hermione. Since her widowhood Mrs. Armitage had lived much abroad, so that her early friendship with Denis had been maintained chiefly by correspondence, and Hermione she had seen but seldom. To their surviving kinsfolk she was a person known about more or less vaguely and still unmet.

On that sad-coloured November day her entrance had a perceptibly enlivening effect in the small drawing-room, which seemed to be over-full of women blackly clad. Her navy-blue serge, with touches of a lighter shade, and silvery grey furs looked by comparison positively gay; and, again by comparison, her aspect was positively youthful. For the spinster sisters were frankly old, and

the two matrons belonged to a generation which flaunted the signs of incipient elderliness, thus disguising the fact that Mrs. Armitage, with her fresh complexion and trim figure, was not many years their junior.

Mrs. Armitage's object in calling was to see the baby ; her *ostensible* object one of her critics afterwards termed it, because she allowed herself to be satisfied with so very brief and superficial a sight. The baby was, in fact, asleep when she reached the nursery ; and when, just as she was rather hurriedly taking leave after tea, it had been reported to have waked up, she declined a second view. " Of course, its eyes are blue at present, like a kitten's," she said, " so I'd be none the wiser for seeing them open. She is better-looking than most small infants, I think, but one can't predict much from that either. I hope that she will have her mother's pretty brown hair." Hence Miss Ellen Peyton inferred that Mrs. Armitage did not really care a pin about children, an unwomanly and unamiable trait, to which she presently added the more reprehensible one that Mrs. Armitage hated dogs. For she, in answer to a question, had said : " As I'm often on my travels, a dog would be a burden both to itself and me, so I never keep one." And what, Miss Peyton argued, could more plainly prove a selfish shrinking from a little trouble ? Meanwhile her sister Dora had been led to some even graver conclusions.

" Not the least," Mrs. Armitage had promptly replied to an inquiry whether she took an interest in Church work ; " it never was a hobby of mine. But, of course, the main point is to have a hobby of some kind," she continued, making matters worse in a well-meant endeavour to avoid seeming unsympathetic. Now, in the eyes of Miss Dora, to whom existence, apart from an active participation in St. Anselm's parochial affairs, appeared an aimless blank, indifference about Church

work was a serious defect ; but to speak of it as a hobby was to be downright irreverent, a far more heinous moral offence. Therefore, it was only natural that when laudatory comments followed Mrs. Armitage's departure, Charlie Quin pronouncing her to be quite charming, and his wife pleasant enough, the Miss Peytons opposed to the mildest praise a glum silence, which they broke at last with a note of disapprobation. "Wasn't it rather *odd* of her to come?" said Miss Dora. And Miss Ellen said: "I wonder what she came *for*?"

"Well, you know," said Charlie Quin, "considering that she was so fond of poor Helveran's mother, and such an old friend of Helveran himself, it would have been hardly decent if she hadn't called, or done something." He merely intended inoffensively to vindicate Mrs. Armitage from the charge of oddness ; but the Miss Peytons saw, and mutely resented, an implication that they were ignorant about the usages of polite society. "I don't see that she can have had any object in going out of her way to be civil," Mrs. Charlie said, backing up her husband in reply to Miss Ellen.

"Oh, of course, my dear Mrs. Quin, she may not have had the remotest object," Miss Ellen admitted. And her dear Mrs. Quin at once felt vaguely convinced that Mrs. Armitage's visit had either an object or something worse.

Next morning, however, a complete revulsion of feeling was caused by a letter from Mrs. Armitage, the contents of which surprised and pleased everybody :

"DEAR MR. QUIN," she wrote to Charlie, "it is my wish, if the arrangement would suit you, to undertake the charge of your little niece. For some time past I have thought that the bringing up of a child all the way from infancy would be an extremely interesting occupa-

tion, and especially would it be so if the child were Denis Helveran's daughter, and a grand-daughter of his very dear mother. I am rather inexperienced about children, but I would, of course, keep a first-rate nurse for her, under my own constant supervision; and as I have no other ties, I could live wherever it seemed most expedient for her, with respect either to health or educational advantages.

"About a month ago her father told me how he stood financially. I understand that she will have an income to start with of something over two hundred pounds. As for many years to come her expenses will fall much short of that, I calculate that by the time she is twenty her income will have increased by fully one-half, and I propose to add what will raise it to at least five hundred pounds. This will enable her to pursue any special line of study, or so forth, that she may wish—she may inherit her father's musical gifts, which were considerable, though he never had a chance of developing them—and, in any case, to live quite comfortably and independently, if she does not marry. My age being thirty-five, and my health excellent, it is probable that, barring accidents, I shall remain vigorous and active, at any rate, until she is old enough to take care of herself; but I should at once secure her the income I mention by a codicil to my will. My own means are ample, and I would do my best to give her a pleasant home and a happy youth. You must excuse this ungraceful self-advertisement, which I trust will not so far prejudice you against me as to deter you from considering my proposal favourably.

"Yours sincerely,

"EDITH ARMITAGE."

At its first reading, which took place during luncheon,

in the presence of both Charles and Bernard Quin, the proposal did seem to have every prospect of favourable consideration.

"Well done, Mrs. Armitage," said Charlie Quin. "It sounds as if she would be the making of this poor little girl."

"Five hundred a year—why, she will be quite an heiress," said Mrs. Bernard. "And, what is perhaps more to the purpose, Mrs. Armitage writes very kindly."

"And what's most to the purpose, she'll be in a position to carry out her plans," said Charlie. "I know that her people, the Astons, are all as rich as Jews—rolling about in money, as our old Fräulein Lindheim used to say, when she talked English idiomatically."

"It will save an infinity of trouble on the journey home, and in every way, thank goodness," Mrs. Charlie said to herself; and aloud: "Of course, one couldn't decline anything so much to the child's advantage." She spoke with a slight howl, as if she were mournfully acquiescing in a sacrifice demanded of her.

"I should think *not*," said her husband promptly. His relief was so much more moderate than hers that he felt no need to dissemble it. "I only wish that somebody would provide as handsomely for Vi and her sisters, but their faces seem likely to be their fortunes."

"Well, they are very bonny little ones," Mrs. Bernard felt called upon to say. The duty of giving an agreeable turn to things was one which generally found her inclined to fulfil it; and the genuine good-nature of her tone in thus complimenting Mrs. Charlie's plain, fat children so gratified their mother, that with a wish somehow to reciprocate she offered her sister-in-law's son, Hugh Maxwell, another pancake, calling him "my dear child." This was, however, declined vicariously by Mrs. Bernard, as outfitting business obliged them to depart speedily,

which they presently did, under the impression that one of the family problems had been satisfactorily solved.

Soon afterwards arrived the Miss Peytons, who were forthwith told about this happy improvement in the prospects of the derelict baby. They listened at first with rather disappointing stolidity, and paused before making any comment. Then Miss Dora said impassively: "It seems very strange;" and Miss Ellen, in like manner: "I wonder *why* she wants to take the child away from you." It was such an unexpected view of the case that for a moment Mrs. Charlie remained amazed and dumb, uttering only a slight gasp as if at a splash of cold water. Her husband replied, however, explanatorily, supposing that they must have missed the point of the news: "Why, she intends to make our little niece's fortune; adopt her, and all that sort of thing." And thereupon he went into particulars about how the baby's two hundred was to become five hundred a year.

"Two hundred," said Miss Dora; "that seems such a nice, suitable income to have provided for her. It sounds like an answer to the wise man's prayer of old: 'Give me neither poverty nor riches.'"

"It does, indeed," said Miss Ellen.

"He'd have a good solid chunk of poverty bestowed on him, in most people's opinion, if that was all," said Charlie Quin; "and no doubt poor Denis would have thought five hundred much more suitable if he could have managed it. But it was past praying for."

"I'd no idea that she would have so much—as two hundred—I thought you said it came to a hundred a year at the most," his wife said, suddenly feeling aggrieved. It was preposterous, if one came to consider, that an outsider like Mrs. Armitage should have been better informed than herself about Denis's finances.

"That was a mistake of mine," said Charlie. "Denis's life-insurance policy is for four thousand instead of two, as I had fancied; and old Admiral Telward's legacy amounts to nearer fifteen hundred than a thousand. I never *had* a good head for figures."

"It would be a great pity if so much money were not turned to the best account," said Miss Dora. "One so often hears of whole fortunes being lost by rash investments."

"Mrs. Armitage struck me as being a rather slighty sort of person," put in Miss Ellen.

"Oh, the principal would, of course, remain in the hands of the trustees, my brother's and my own that is," said Charlie. "Besides, for that matter, she's far more solvent than either of us. There can be no question of any such difficulties."

"Yes, but when a person takes to speculating, which is really only a form of gambling, *I* think, you never can tell how soon every penny of capital may be frittered away, and nothing left except the interest to depend upon," Miss Dora persisted very eagerly. "What a dreadful thing it would be to have the poor child returned on your hands without a farthing. And then people are so careless. Even if Mrs. Armitage meant to leave her something, she might never make a will, or sign it."

"Certainly we should do nothing in a hurry," Mrs. Charlie said, feeling helplessly how far she was from being such an expert and knowing woman of business as Miss Peyton, yet keenly alive to risks of incurring not only trouble but expense. The causes of the peril might still seem obscure, but from them emerged a vivid picture of the luckless baby first handed over to a comparative stranger along with many hundred pounds, and then handed back minus the pounds, to encumber the

household at Craiganogue. "Most certainly," Mrs. Charlie repeated; "we must take time to consider." And Miss Dora said: "It would be much safer."

Her sister, whose mind had meanwhile continued to run on Mrs. Armitage's motives, now intervened with a conjecture. "The worst of it is that one can't tell what she would want to do with the poor child when she had got hold of it. She may have queer fads about teaching, and clothes, and that sort of thing. Wasn't there a man Grandpapa Cobham knew, who adopted little girls to educate, and used to run pins into their arms, and fire off pistols at them, by way of strengthening their unfortunate nerves?"

"I don't remember," said Miss Dora. "But her manner gave one the impression that she might think eccentricity rather fine."

"I know she refused point-blank to join Lady Axwold's branch of the Anti-Vivisection League, which looks bad, I think," Miss Ellen said, continuing her line of argument. "People who take to trying odious experiments never do mind *how* cruel they are. I remember seeing a case in the newspaper about a doctor and his wife, who brought up one of their children on raw meat in an outhouse, and trained it to catch rats with its teeth, with just a little straw by way of a bed. They say that it used to growl and howl over its food like a wild beast. The wretches were sent to prison, as they richly deserved."

Miss Dora resumed, keeping to her special point of view: "I must confess that I didn't like her tone; it was very far from reverent in speaking of Church matters. Indeed, for anything we know, she may not even be a Churchwoman at all. But, of course, *that* is a point which you would have to ascertain immediately, and meanwhile it is right to give her charitably the benefit

of the doubt. I can only say that *I* should be extremely sorry to see poor dear Mina's daughter growing up in charge of a person with opinions."

As she listened to the old ladies' discourse, Mrs. Charlie's visions of a bankrupt baby might well have been succeeded by a still more distressing one of the ill-fated infant howling heresies over a Seythian repast. Yet though it is true that any single detail of their darkest prophecies, considered separately, would have struck her as highly absurd, collectively they diffused an atmosphere of mistrustful uneasiness. It was, indeed, impossible to suppose that Mrs. Armitage would maltreat her little charge, but in no-wise difficult to believe her capable of speculative rashness; and both suspicions got mixed up in Mrs. Charlie's disquieted mind. Furthermore, at the bottom of her heart lurked a reluctance which protested against the transfer of that two hundred a year to anybody else's keeping. The more she considered it, the more acutely she felt that to do so would be a self-renouncing ordinance. Hitherto she had assumed the small orphan to be not more than just decently provided for; but now it appeared that there was quite a substantial margin, and the discovery had come along with a proposal, the acceptance of which would debar the orphan's family from any participation in the benefits thence accruing. An inkling of this had pricked through even her first hasty rejoicing over Mrs. Armitage's letter, and grew clearer on reflection. After all, Mrs. Charlie said to herself, the adopted baby's prospective five hundred a year would make no difference to *them*; two hundred, expended at Craiganogue, would be much more to *their* purpose. Not that she had any discreditable designs. She was merely viewing her little niece in the character of a paying guest, whose sojourn in their out-at-elbow establishment would legiti-

mately be a source of some profit. All the nursery party must benefit by the improvements which it would be right to introduce on their cousin's account. It would be neither necessary nor expedient, nor, in fact, possible, to draw hard and fast lines about shares of expenses. Things would just muddle along more comfortably. As for saving up such quantities of money as Mrs. Armitage said they ought to do, that seemed simply ridiculous ; at any rate, it was no business of hers. Really it was extraordinary how fond some people were of meddling with other people's affairs.

But, however natural and justifiable, these considerations were hardly of a kind which she cared to allege as the reason for her change of mind about retaining the troublesome charge. Unwillingness to let two hundred a year go out of the family was a motive which could not be dressed up finely or even respectably. She would be obliged to put forward reluctance to part with her sister-in-law's child, grounds which she felt required strengthening. Therefore she leant the readier ear to the Miss Peytons' suggestions of risks and affronts.

"I think we may presume," Miss Dora observed, "that our friend came to inspect *you* more than the baby ; and, apparently, she did not look upon you as desirable guardians." She tittered slightly to intimate that the true word and the jest were mingled in her remark ; and Mrs. Charlie tittered too, saying : "Oh, do you really think so ?" But in her own mind she called Mrs. Armitage an odiously impudent woman.

At this moment the party in the drawing-room had a passing glimpse through the window of the only orphan as her nurse carried her out for an airing in the mild afternoon sunshine. The nurse, a pretty-looking girl, much decorated with snowy muslin frills and lappets, in the fashion of the day, was a pleasantly picturesque

figure, but from that point of view thrown away upon Mrs. Charlie. She said to herself: "There won't be the slightest occasion to keep one of those over-dressed trained nurses. Outlandishly expensive they are, and endless trouble in a house. I can get one who will do every atom as well for less than half the wages at home." So far had she proceeded in her resolve to keep the baby after all.

When, on the Miss Peytons' departure, she told her husband of her changed views, he made some demur. Women were a caution for never knowing their own minds, he said. Remove a grievance that they've been squawking over like a dozen hens, and they'll squawk like *two* dozen. He thought it a pity, partly on account of Mrs. Armitage, who seemed so much set on the plan, and partly because it would obviously have been greatly to the poor little mortal's advantage. What rubbish had those silly old hags been putting into her head? These objections he urged without enthusiasm or energy, feeling that the arrangement did not much affect him personally one way or the other; in his big, rambling barrack of a house the presence of one child more or less would, he well knew, signify little to him; it was Ethel's affair chiefly. So he presently acquiesced in the same half-hearted manner, and thereupon began reflecting that it might save trouble not to have any business transactions with a woman, perhaps a fussy one, who would bother about punctual quarterly payments and so forth. On the whole, it might have been a bore. The Bernard Quins, returning, made rather more difficulty, remonstrating with some seriousness, for they had both been favourably impressed by Mrs. Armitage, and had estimated highly the chance which it was now proposed to fling away. Still, they could not protest very strongly, Ethel Quin's sincerely professed reluctance

to part with poor Mina's child being a sentiment which they must perforce respect. Their own position, moreover, on the threshold of an important new venture diminished their interest in the matter. And by that evening's post a letter of refusal was sent, signed by Charles Quin, who would have learned with surprise that it had been practically dictated by the old Miss Peytons.

Such was the case, however. One is occasionally tempted to wish that the gods would for a while discard some of their old ironies, which have long since been worn into platitudes and commonplaces. Two of these made themselves obtrusively obvious in the event here related: in the unconscious ignorance of the person most concerned, and the triviality of the cause by which it was brought about. For the baby was certainly altogether indifferent as to whither she fared, or under whose charge she abode; and as certainly her destination had been determined by nothing less effete than a feeling of mild malevolence on the part of two silly old women, directed against a person who seemed to differ from them about dogmas and dogs. Their intervention availed to deflect the whole course of a young human being's existence, with the effect of the insignificant obstacle, no more than a twig or a pebble, which at the very source of the springing stream may form its watershed, and ordain that it shall flow not east, but west. Accordingly westward, in no figurative sense, went the only orphan, to find among the loughs and boglands of Con-naught a dwelling at Craiganogue.

Before her arrival there she had been given, with all due rites and ceremonies, the names of Hermione Elsie. The second was a compromise, as her godmother, Mrs. Bernard Quin, fearing lest the child, destitute of parents and brethren, might otherwise never acquire any pet-

name of her own, had wished to call her *Elf*, a choice opposed by Charlie Quin on the grounds that she would then be sure to grow up six feet high, and large in proportion. Neither apprehension was fulfilled. Little Hermione attained to no lofty stature, and was by and by almost as amply provided with changes of name as the Matron Earth or the Maiden Moon. She answered to Mina and Hermy and My and Hyena, the last incurred by her own earliest attempts at pronouncing her long four syllables; but more often to Mio, which became her usual designation.

CHAPTER II

AT Craiganogue Mio Helveran passed through her first experiences of existence slowly, as needs must every child started on a path beset with speed-arresting strangeness. That light-hearted period of life did not fail to bring her the many harassing cares which are seldom absent from it, and she had, perhaps, rather less than a normal equipment of youthful elasticity wherewith to resist their pressure, being by no means robust, and possessing a slender store of what our forefathers used to call animal spirits. In compensation, however, she owned a right of way into regions on the solitary shore of old Romance, whither she often sought a refuge, and found it too. She fared tolerably well in the important matter of caretakers, those nurses and nursery-maids whom all the better-to-do entrust with the moulding of their children's minds while in the wax and marble stage. Little Mio was so far fortunate that the ruling powers of her nursery were nothing worse than foolish and lazy, and that her own propensities seldom conflicted with theirs. Naturally enough, they looked upon their charges as so many more or less probable sources of superfluous trouble, to prevent which from actually arising was their constant aim. Their commonest means towards that end was the attachment of tremendous and awful sanctions to such virtues as

keeping garments whole, and not straying out of sight. A taste for quiet, unenterprising pursuits made the practice of these virtues habitual with Mio, who thus escaped much terrorizing; but, then, to set against that, she was by temperament more than ordinarily capable of fears inspired by suggested dangers and ugly mysteries; and some objects of dread, created by the authorities to serve only as temporary bugbears, became for her permanent murky shadows on her path.

For instance, along the walks on which the young Quins were daily escorted, a frequent route led along by a high old wall, overgrown with shrubs and creepers, and screening from the road a dismal, weedy burial-ground. One early autumn morning, when the little procession passed that way, Mio lagged behind, tempted to loiter by the alluring tiny white balls which glistened on the snowberry bushes at the wall's foot. She was busied with much enjoyment in gathering the slender sprays, on which the glossy white berries clustered beneath tufts of delicate pink blossom, when her pleasure suddenly vanished away, shattered by a screech from Lizzie Cogan, the nursery-maid, who turned round and stopped to call shrilly: "Och now, Miss Mio, what delaying have you at all? Come along out of that with you! Saints and patience, but you're the tiresome child! And you dawdling there right under the round hole that the dead people on the inside of it do be looking out at. What 'ud you say, now, if a big bony hand, with ne'er a tatter of skin left on it, come clawing out at you, the way Tim Malone seen it one evening, and he stopping to spy what was rustling up in the ivy leaves—the more fool he? Run along here this minyit, before it's grabbing you."

Mio glanced up aghast, and just then a waft of wind went by, flirting down on her a few withered leaves.

She brushed them off with a horror too intense for shrieking, and fled from the place, approach, or merely the prospect of approach, to which became thenceforward one of her recurrent miseries. Ever afterwards, indeed, a shower of falling leaves was associated in her memory with that grisly moment, and would make her heart sink unawares.

This Lizzie Cogan was the origin of another still more harassing alarm, which haunted the child's walks abroad. For it had been Lizzie who declared that the club-footed man, who drove about the lanes in a donkey-cart, gathering up household debris such as rags and bones and bottles, was certainly the Devil. In confirmation of this statement, which she herself really more than half believed, she pointed to the man's malformed feet as being imperfectly concealed hoofs; and he was, in fact, of a swarthy ugliness appropriate enough to the character. Not for a moment could Mio doubt a truth so well attested, and after it had been revealed to her, the expectation of the infernal encounter caused her perpetually to walk in fear and dread. On some days the meeting did not take place at all, so that the horrors of anticipation hung over her the whole way; on others, the terrific crisis arrived soon after they had started, and then she used to proceed with a relieved sense of security at least until to-morrow, which seems a long respite to a few years old. But this was only at first. An unlucky day came when the movements of donkey-cart and walking-party brought them face to face with one another a second time; and, in consequence, Mio felt despairingly that she could never be safe again. For her limited topographical knowledge gave her no clue to possibilities, and left her defenceless against the darkest apprehensions.

There was yet another trying experience, somewhat

resembling these, though not due, like them, to her ghostly enemies, through which she always had to go on Sundays when she attended service at Feristown Church. Because the bell-ringer there was a half-witted man, known as Dinny the Jigger, who stood tugging his rope in the little porch, where the entering congregation had only just room to pass him by in single file. It was his habit to bend low at each tug, which he accompanied with a hideous grimace, specially designed, Mio nothing doubted, as a menace to the passing person. When that person was herself, it inspired undoubtedly extreme dismay. All the way up the long, wide-flagged path to the church door her spirit quailed at the coming ordeal of confronting at such close quarters those unsightly mops and mows; and her knowledge that the same repellent figure would probably be lurking somewhere near damped her joy at emerging into the open air. Yet it was the joy of a very weary captive, doomed through her elders' want of imagination and common sense to spend more than two hours, a substantial fragment of eternity for a small child, in mute immobility, on pain of appearance as an object of amazed disgust in the eyes of her assembled world, nothing less than that being the recognized consequence of fidgetiness in church. Mio never was fidgety; nevertheless, on one occasion she incurred this penalty. During an interminable first lesson she found herself beginning to slip steadily off the steeply-sloped seat-cushion upon which she was perched with feet dangling many inches from the floor. As long as she could she held on with a desperate clutch, but vainly, as before the "Here endeth" made standing permissible, down she helplessly slid, causing a crash that seemed to her as if it resounded through the universe, and that was really almost as loud as if somebody had dropped a good-sized hymn-book. It was a

shocking occurrence, and though her uncle picked her up with a reassuring: "Never mind, little wee woman; no harm done," she remained covered with confusion all the rest of the service.

Something to set against these trials, however, came to her in connection with Feristown Church. It happened thus. Towards three o'clock on a Sunday afternoon in the course of her fourth summer, Mio was with Lizzie Coglan at the far end of the big Craiganogue kitchen garden. Mio had not been taken to church that morning, because the car was crowded, an arrangement which had pleased her better than it did Lizzie, who had had to hurry back without dawdling from ten-o'clock mass, that she might assume charge of the stay-at-home. And attendance at mass, with no ensuing gossip, is an insipid and unsatisfying entertainment. Now, however, she was fairly well amused, looking out on the road through a depression in the top of the garden wall, which had been roughly crenellated by the weathering of many years, and the scaling of agile trespassers. She here had a chance of a word with neighbours going by, and the certainty of soon espying the return of the party from Feristown. Meanwhile Mio, who had seated herself on the lowest stone step up to a decadent lattice-work arbour, which occupied an angle of the wall, was for the time being much happier than Lizzie. She had imagined a crack running across the granite slab into a marvellous thoroughfare, along which all manner of things travelled to the tune of "*Silent O Moyle*. This tune haunted her with a melancholy delight, though she had heard it only once, and that under difficulties. An old fiddler, seated on a heap of broken stones in a deep-banked breen, had been playing it one day, apparently for his own solace, when the Craiganogue children passed by, in charge of nurse and nursery-maid. The troop,

Lizzie Coglan included, had shown a tendency to stop and listen, which was discouraged by Mrs. Lee, who said : " Now don't be standing there. It's only an old *drimin dhu* he's scraping, and we're apt to get a heavy plump of rain agin we're home, unless we're stepping on." Despite this injunction, Mio had remained as if spellbound until the end of the air, which glimmered from the strings of the poor instrument like a captive's lovely and mournful face seen behind prison bars ; and she would have tarried still longer if the old man had seemed likely to repeat it. But he had begun to stuff his fiddle into a ragged grey linen bag ; so, seeing no prospect of any more music, she raced after the others. Ever since then, a long month ago, she had remembered the tune, and had sometimes tried, without much success, to hum it in a soft, small voice. Its cadences now, in her mind's ear, accompanied the fantastic procession, which, in her mind's eye, she saw moving along the barleycorn-wide track. She was *very* happily oblivious of everything else.

Suddenly her daydream was broken like a bubble by footsteps on the mossy path, between the currant-bushes, down which came two old ladies in black, with broad lilac ribbons about their bonnets and modest plumes called ostrich-tips. They were her great-grand-aunts, the Miss Peytons, at this time guests of a neighbouring nephew, who had driven them over, after an early luncheon, to renew their acquaintance with the Charlie Quins and poor Denis Helveran's little girl.

" And so the others are all away ? " Miss Ellen said, when Mio had been identified and greeted.

" Yes, they all went on the car to the Howly Place," Mio said, looking up at her gravely with large eyes, which had kept the dark-blue of their earliest days.

" Dear child," Miss Ellen said, kissing her again, much

more affectionately than at first. "What a nice reverent way of speaking!"

"But, my dear Nellie, *what* a brogue!" said Miss Dora. "I wonder that Mrs. Quin isn't more careful about letting her pick it up."

Now, in point of fact, neither Mio's piety nor her accent was by any means as remarkable as her old great-grand-aunts supposed, her epithet being simply a succinct criticism on the psalmody at Feristown Church. But they were never disillusioned, so that the favourable impression made on Miss Ellen Peyton proved a lasting one, and even left traces on her will, probate of which was granted a year or two later. In a codicil to it she bequeathed to her great-grand-niece, Hermione Elsie Helveran, a Prayer-book and Hymns Ancient and Modern bound together in Russian leather; a case containing a much dilapidated violin, and an old-fashioned brooch, with a centre of glazed hair. Nobody envied Mio her legacy, nor was she herself elated by it. That the articles should have been presented by a person who was dead seemed to her a rather dismally solemn feature, and apart from this, they were not of much interest. Her Aunt Ethel remarked encouragingly of the odiferous volume that it was very nice, and she hoped Mio would take good care of it; but Mio, though she did her best, could not conjure up liking enough for it to defend her against self-accusations of ingratitude. Luckily she was not called upon to feign any admiration for the old broken violin; no one could, it being so obviously just a worthless bit of wreckage. "Really," Mrs. Quin said to her husband, "I should have been ashamed to leave such utter rubbish to anybody. What can she have been thinking of?" And he replied: "I daresay the poor old woman had forgotten that it was such a hopeless smash; or it may have been in better

repair when she saw it last." But Norah Bannon, a ghoulish kitchen-maid, who saw the black case in the hall, pronounced it to be like a young coffin, and averred that it gave her the cold creeps, which suggested to the elder children its possible utility, should they ever act a charade involving a funeral. Therefore, they made a note of the place in the lumber-room where it was stowed away. As for the brooch, with its scrap of faded brownish plait, in a setting all tarnished and dim, it looked like a trinket of very little value. But the Feristown jeweller, who polished it up one day for its new owner, eliciting marvellous rainbow-hued flashes, said that the stones were singularly fine brilliants, clear-set, and worth a pot of money. He was an elderly man, who had seen better days in grander establishments than O'Meara's box of a shop in the Main Street, and he spoke with some expert knowledge. Mio was at the moment rather disconcerted by this report on her brooch, because she feared lest her Aunt Ethel might consider that such a valuable piece of property required grown-up keeping, and would lock it away inaccessibly along with some other pretty things which were to be Mio's far off in an unimaginably indefinite future. Her aunt being, however, just then occupied with some other business, did not overhear Mr. O'Meara's remark, and Mio retained possession of her brooch, which she kept with a few treasured trifles in a cardboard soap-box. She liked to look at its many-coloured gleams, though she did not care about wearing it, as she thus lost sight of them. But she often lent it on Sundays to her youngest cousin Carrie, who was fond of such things in a more usual way.

Even this Carrie, nearest to her in age, was her senior by almost four years, a disparity which set them as far apart during Mio's earliest infancy as if they had inhabited

different planets ; and her elder cousins were, of course, still further remote. Not that the closest approximation in age would probably ever have made her and the young Quins what could be called great company to one another. They were too much unlike in points which in ordinary circumstances tend to hold aloof. Both physically and mentally, she differed from them in their robust bigness and small stock of ideas, being herself rather fragilely diminutive of frame and very active of mind. Hence, it naturally followed that she did not share their taste in recreations, which she persistently shunned with positive repugnance. "For, you see," she once explained to her cousin Gerald, when excusing herself from joining a game of ball, "an amusing thing that doesn't amuse you is worse than nothing at all. It's like a fly that goes crawling about without wings, and is ever so much nastier even than the buzzing ones." But Gerald, who was affronted at her refusal, merely replied : "Oh, blathers ! We only wanted you to pick it up when it drops ; you can't catch a bit. You're welcome to stay there and play with your beastly old flies." If, indeed, they had done anything that appealed to the imagination, she would have responded eagerly enough ; but their favourite romps seemed to her just orgies of bawling and yelling, in which she took no delight, as she lacked the love of noise for its own sake, so general among vigorous children, and not uncommon among their elders. Therefore, meditations of her own, carried on in an undisturbed corner, continued to be her chosen employ, when she was of a size to have trotted about with the others. Nevertheless, she was attached to themselves, albeit not to their society, and looked up to them in some respects, though not without a critical spirit. Jack, Fred and Gerald, Vi, Flossie and Carrie, were essential ingredients in her world ; she had never

attempted to imagine it minus them ; instinctively, she would have defended them against the censures of any outsider. Especially she would have stood up for Jack, whom she liked best, and who had, indeed, done her one important service—by teaching her the alphabet many months before anybody would have thought of beginning her education. Want of occupation was his motive, coupled with amusement at watching how very hard Mio stared, and how extremely wide she opened her eyes, at the big letters. Soon afterwards he saw with surprise, and a species of awe, that she had taught herself to read, and was absorbed in poring over a quite advanced story-book. Jack drew Vi's attention to the student. "She doesn't look the size of a frog-hopper, the queer little miscreant," he said, feeling as if he had undesignedly set in motion some curious mechanism.

"I know she's been always running after us lately, wanting us to tell her what things spell," said Vi, who at this time had more than thrice Mio's years, and was herself shaky about difficult words. "She's rather a plague. Why did you put it into her head ?"

"Oh, she did nearly all the picking up herself," said Jack, "and I expect she'd have got at it, anyhow, before long without my help. I daresay she'll be teaching *you* presently ; she's sharp enough." But though Jack made light of his part in the matter, Mio, who found much solace in her access to books, always ascribed it with gratitude to his elementary lessons.

Next to Jack in her affection came Carrie ; but in this case Mio was drawn by services she had rendered rather than received. Even across the gap of four years she was able at a very early age to act as Carrie's champion and defender, and of such good offices Carrie had much need. Her first start in life might be considered in many respects unfortunate. She had never enjoyed the privi-

leges of the youngest, having been ousted from them by a broken leg and prolonged illness, which had made her immediate predecessor Gerald her mother's spoiled pet during all her babyhood. His recovered powers of hobbling about had coincided with her earliest attempts at toddling, and quite eclipsed their interest, because there was no reason for anxiety as to her probable degree of lameness; while other incidents of the same sort continually affected her nursery days. But the disability which placed her at the most serious disadvantage was her temper being such that her brethren found her an inviting victim when they desired to torment. Quick to take offence, she relinquished it slowly, partly because she was naturally sullen, and partly on account of her unreadiness at even the very obvious rejoinders which would have enabled her to hold her own in a combat of such homely wits, assuaging her resentment with the remembrance of successful retorts discourteous. Failing this, she spent much time in brooding morosely over unavenged injuries, and was gradually thrust into the position of a dolcful target for her family's jests and jibes. From her onlooker's point of vantage Mio soon saw how matters stood, and before anyone would have credited her with observing them, they had begun to cause her a vague uneasiness, which evolved itself into a definite sense of injustice, and a wish that somebody would take Carrie's part. Little Mio Helveran's taste in jokes differed essentially from that of the young Quins; and though she often perceived more quickly than her cousins the silliness of Carrie's sayings, the loud, immoderate mirth which they excited in the others seemed to her still more stupid, and ill-natured besides. It was unfair, she thought, that nobody made fun of them, when they were tiresome and disagreeable enough to go on laughing at Carrie after she had got quite cross.

And then they guffawed in such a senseless way—like great idiots. Thus pity for the oppressed, and a desire that the gods might be shown more just, not unmingled with a tincture of intellectual arrogance, had worked together in Mio's mind long before she had any impulse herself to intervene.

The first occasion on which she overtly allied herself with Carrie befell when they were respectively about six years and ten years old. One of Carrie's foibles was a longing to associate herself with the high-flown and romantic, which untowardly happened to become her no better than a cow a coronet. This predilection drew down on her most outspoken ridicule whenever she had the imprudence to betray it, and also had the effect of making her seriously dissatisfied with her own commonplace Christian name. When reflecting upon it, she sometimes wished that the grandmother after whom she was called had never been born; and she often sharpened the edge of her discontent by regretfully dwelling on the wealth of euphony and romance from which she had been doled out just an ugly Caroline, little better than Sarah or Jane. Then, to make her lot seem the more unfair, her elder sisters had met with so much kinder treatment; Violet and Florence were nice enough. But among all the tantalizing might-have-beens, the most poignant was the thought of Muriel; if she had had the chance of choosing, on that blessed name she would have fixed. Thus it came to pass that once, in a paroxysm of fond imagining, she sought in some degree to realize her vain desire by altering the inscription of the fly-leaf of her "Little Women" into "Mewrial"—for orthography was not her strong point—"Caroline Quin," and thereupon with characteristic stupidity left the book lying about. Inevitably her small act of folly was soon discovered, and noised abroad with clamorous

derision. By her unlucky mis-spelling she had supplied to the wits of the mockers a ready-made joke, on which they eagerly seized, so that feline caterwaulings and cries of "Poor pussy" assailed her wherever she appeared. She could foresee no end to it; on the contrary, indeed, everything threatened a permanent and galling addition to the burden of her life.

Towards sunset on that ill-starred day, Carrie, fleeing from her tormentors through the weedy-walked pleasure-grounds, took refuge in a tumble-down arbour, smothered by over-grown laurels. Flushed and breathless, half blind with tears of mortification, she was at first unaware that her cousin Mio already occupied a corner, happily immersed in "Feats on the Fiords." When she found that she was not alone, she did not mind, dreading no ridicule from that quarter; but presently her heart sank at approaching sounds, which proved the idleness of the hope that she had escaped into a safe hiding-place. Beating down the shrubbery path came footsteps, bringing nearer the hated shouts of "Poor pussy," mingled with more or less realistic mews and squalls. These facetious pursuers were close to the arbour's entrance, and had fallen silent as they stooped beneath the low-hanging boughs, when suddenly from within uprose a highly successful rendering of an ass's bray. Starting with the first abrupt trumpet notes, it proceeded through all the elaborate fanfares and flourishes, until the last long-drawn, concertina-like cadence had been most accurately reproduced. Yet was it a mimicry in elf-like miniature, suggesting a quadruped suitable for Queen Mab's teams, to infer its dimensions from the timbre of its voice. The innuendo was at once understood, even by Carrie of the unready wits. "Why, of course, that's just what they are—a pack of great donkeys!" she exclaimed with glee. "Do it again, Mio." And Mio

did it again. As for the aggressive party, their admiration of the performance prevented any chagrin at the rebuff, but not their sense that it would be futile to persevere in an attack which exposed them to such an effective retort. So they went off laughing, and the pseudo Muriel heard no more of her indiscretion in that particular instance. It had, however, many successors, the consequences of which were not to be averted by Mio's intervention, faithful as was her support of her ally.

CHAPTER III

MRS. ARMITAGE'S desire to adopt an infant, having taken a strong hold on her mind, was not uprooted by her failure to obtain charge of the Helveran baby ; in fact, only a few weeks after she had received Charlie Quin's disappointing letter she entered on negotiations about another child. Naturally enough, the many-meshed web of circumstance considered, she carried them on through a person between whom and little Mio's incompilant guardians there was a connecting thread. For this Lady Fenlow, who wrote on the subject, was mother-in-law to Mrs. Charlie Quin's youngest sister Mabel Fenlow, as well as a friend of long standing to the candidate protégé's father, Lambert Delaney. Two facts there were which Mrs. Armitage at first thought unpromising : for one thing, the child was only half an orphan, its father still surviving, and her opinion had been that nothing less than the *force majeure* of such a catastrophe as death could exonerate a parent for renouncing his responsibilities with the permanence and completeness which she would demand. If, then, he consented, she could not but disapprove of his conduct, and feel that she had instigated a misdeed ; while nothing short of full and undisturbed possession would be consistent with her plans. But Lady Fenlow, by and by coming to call, offered explanations, before which

this dilemma dissolved away. It was certain, she declared, that Captain Delancy, for reasons by no means discreditable to himself, would be willing unconditionally to surrender the child. The facts were that from the effects of injuries received in a laboratory accident several months ago, he was now rapidly becoming blind, and that——

Here Mrs. Armitage exclaimed commiseratingly, and turned her eyes involuntarily towards the bright window. She was sitting with her visitor in a pleasant, oval-shaped room, lined nest-like with shaded green, into which glistened a white December landscape, lit up by the afternoon sun. Long rays touched the feathery frost-work on branch and blade with transparent fiery rose, and made burning seven-hued stars of some large drops hung arow, swelled into crystal globes, but spell-stopped by icy air before they could fall.

"Blind—how very terrible!" she said, looking away from the light to Lady Fenlow, who sat facing it.

"Very, indeed," Lady Fenlow assented, yet not dolefully enough to detract from her general aspect of placid prosperity, her comfortable portliness ensconced in a well-cushioned corner of the Chesterfield, and enveloped amply in luxurious furs. She had for months past been aware of Lambert Delancy's oncoming affliction, and had grown used to it, as the most sympathetic among us do so quickly—on behalf of another person. "The doctors give him no hope, even of keeping it off for more than a month or so, and he is facing it courageously. But he has made up his mind that he will not let his little son be with him. He considers it bad for a child to associate constantly with anyone who has any abnormal affliction. So if little Alfred doesn't go to you, some other domicile must be found for him. His poor father may be right; still, as he is extremely fond of the

child, he seems to be laying down hard lines for himself, perhaps harder even than is necessary."

"He is right, I think," Mrs. Armitage said. "Of course, morally right. But I mean in his view of the situation. It can't be a good thing to grow up with an object of commiseration continually before your eyes, and your sympathies always in demand. They're sure to run short sometimes, and you'll feel alternately callous and conscience-stricken. Yes, I shouldn't wonder if the separation were to the child's advantage; but that the poor man should give up anything at all likely to provide him with an interest in life seems rather intolerable. Should I encourage him in doing his duty *too* thoroughly if I took it away from him? That's my original difficulty turned upside down; yet there may be something in it."

Lady Fenlow, who did not clearly follow Mrs. Armitage's train of thought, as she reflected aloud on her scruples, saw her apparently hesitating, and remarked in support of the Delaney adoption scheme: "It's an uncommonly fine little fellow, and just a nice age—nearly a year old. He ought to be clever too; his father has quite a genius for mathematics. At one time he was adjutant to my husband, who has the highest opinion of him. So devoted as he was to his profession! And now to have lost all that, and his wife, and his sight, within a few months; certainly he is sorely to be pitied. However, I do really think that to have little Alfred happily settled would be a great relief to his mind."

"Has he any plans for himself?" said Mrs. Armitage. "I daresay he hasn't had the heart yet. It would be so like laying out a corner in black chaos."

"Well, he is so far fortunate," said Lady Fenlow, "that he has two old friends living in the south of Ireland, a brother and sister, people of very congenial tastes, who want him to take up his abode with them."

I believe he will. All three of them delight in music, and talk of looking forward to playing together in trios. Lambert Delaney used at one time to play the 'cello a good deal, and he has begun now to practise on it again, as he says while there is still a glimmer of daylight. He's staying with us, you know, at present, and he apologizes, poor lad, for producing a horrid noise. I don't know one tune from another, and the finest 'cello sounds to me more like the mooing of a despondent cow than anything else; but if it pleased him to play on half a dozen of them all at once, I'm sure I wouldn't mind. The baby's very quiet and good-tempered," she continued, resuming her advocacy through an association of ideas, which struck her as rather absurd, so she added, laughing: "He couldn't well, of course, have developed a taste yet for instrumental music; but he has a fine square-shaped forehead, poor mite, which looks as if he may have inherited his father's mathematical gifts. You know, if you do decide in favour of adopting him, Mrs. Armitage, it will open up many prospects to him later on, that would otherwise be closed by want of means. For the cutting short of his career this way has crippled Captain Delaney very much financially. I doubt, for instance, that he would be able, if he wished, to put his son into the army; getting in, and staying in, are both so expensive. No, no matter how he screwed and pinched himself, I don't believe he ever could." Come of a military clan, and married to a man who had served with distinction, Lady Fenlow spoke and felt as if this was a most grievous consequence of poverty.

Mrs. Armitage said to herself that she would do her best to ascertain what the poor man's wishes were about the boy's profession, and would be guided by them as far as possible. So much were her stipulations about a free hand and entire control modified by the impact

of this pity-compelling misfortune revealed in the other party's lot. Although she did not on that occasion actually commit herself to anything more definite than a call upon little Alfred next day, Lady Fenlow, when leaving her, felt convinced that the project would be carried out, and drove off well pleased, as she had it much at heart.

After her visitor had gone, Mrs. Armitage stood for some time at the window, and watched the ruddy sunset light fade away over the snowy lawn, until there remained visible only white glimmerings among shadowy gloom. Her thoughts were possessed by the doom of the man who was watching all his world fade away into a shoreless night, on which neither sun nor moon could rise. As she considered his calamity quite apart from any other circumstances, her impression was that the whole course of his life thenceforth lay through an endless tunnel, black, stifling, maddening, an experience such as had now and again appalled her for a few monstrous minutes in her childish days. Then, making the inevitable personal application of the event, she shuddered at what was her own peculiar forecast of the most fearful crisis that could come to her: the striking of a match in the dark, and hearing, but not seeing, it light. She quitted that morbid imagination abruptly, and turning inwards to the hearth, began to plan the rearrangement of her household. It was certainly going to be enlarged by the addition of little Alfred Delaney. Of the two drawbacks which had made her doubtful, one had been removed by what she had learned about the special circumstances of the case, and the other yielded to her own further meditations thereupon. It was the sex of the proffered child; for she had at the outset wished to take charge of a girl-baby. There would be no need, she had calculated, to lose sight of her at school, or to

let her go her own way perilously soon, on pain of bringing up a character like a soft-shelled crab, destitute of both backbone and armour. A girl's education, amusements, friends and clothes were matters of which her guardian could take cognisance with understanding and without meddling unduly. In short, the harassing and undignified hen-and-duckling situation would be easily avoided. And if marriage brought a parting, still a girl's household would probably remain more accessible as an object of interest than would a boy's, swayed by his stranger wife. Yet now Mrs. Armitage had no great difficulty in finding considerations to counter-balance these. It was true, no doubt, that with a boy for ward she must make up her mind to devolve responsibilities, and look on while risks were recklessly taken. But, after all, would she really be more ineffectual in one case than in the other? Her powers of intervention might be equally small, though they were limited by different things. If a boy had more scope for destroying his chances, a girl had less for protecting hers. *He* could often run amok against his adverse circumstances, while *she* had helplessly to await their closing in around her. Recalling her own observations and experiences, Mrs. Armitage felt that the aphorism about a man being at some time master of his fate seldom held good of his sister, who was, furthermore, subject in a degree unshared by him to a permanent wreckage of happiness through some merest trifle, as impossible to avert as the alighting of a midge. Much chagrin, then, to the interested looker-on. Which all seemed to show that Edith Armitage might become a not less efficient guardian of, say, Master Alfred Delaney than of Miss Hermione Helveran. These arguments, however, did but justify after the fact the decision at which Mrs. Armitage had arrived before she turned away from the darkening window.

Mrs. Fenlow reported that the arrangement had been made when she shortly afterwards paid Craiganogue a farewell visit, on the point of sailing for Bombay to join her husband, who was in the Indian Civil Service. She frankly expressed her opinion that her sister Ethel had done unwisely in letting Mrs. Armitage's offer go out of the family; and regretted having herself brought about its transfer to the Delaneys by mentioning the matter to her mother-in-law. "For you might have come to an arrangement about poor Mina Helveran's child, after all, if Mrs. Armitage hadn't heard of another so soon," she said. "I daresay you find it more nuisance than you expected; that's generally the way with things. I wish I had held my peace. Do you remember how our Made-moiselle used to say: 'Speak not a word, but take hold of your tongue'? It's remarkable how diligently foreign governesses do practise their English. I'm sorry I didn't act accordingly on this occasion; but, of course, if one never said anything until one was sure of all the consequences, one might——"

"Hould your gab a long while, and then say nothin'," Fred, the second son of the house, shouted suddenly in a violent brogue, emerging from beneath the sofa to utter a fashionable nursery sarcasm.

His mother, startled and annoyed, summarily dismissed him. "I can't imagine where they hear such odious expressions," she said. Then she reverted rather aggrievedly to her sister's suggestion. "I haven't changed my mind at all about keeping the baby. She isn't much trouble; and, in any case, you know, Mrs. Armitage, by all accounts, doesn't seem to be a sort of person that one would care to give the charge of a child. I believe she has very queer opinions. That wouldn't matter so much for a boy; still, one wouldn't like the idea——"

Mrs. Fenlow had seen more of the world, in a more daring spirit, than her elder sister, and replied with some disdain: "Oh, my dear, if *that's* all, opinions are neither here nor there, especially if a person has plenty of money. Bob's mother is much taken with her, and says she's going to do great things for the little Delaney; send him to all sorts of schools and universities, which his poor father couldn't ever afford now. So it will give him a fine chance."

"Nobody can afford any kind of decent schools these times," Mrs. Quin declared with comprehensive discontent; "they're simply ruinous and extortionate." The reference to a governess had made her think regretfully of how long it would be before a superior one was required for poor Mina's baby. That would have been such a convenient advantage for her own elder girls to share. At present they were provided with a meagrely salaried and accomplished Miss Farrell, who was by way of conversing at appointed hours in French with Vi and Flossy. Only yesterday Mrs. Quin had overheard her informing them that Paris was *un beaucoup beau ville*. But it would obviously be absurd to make the baby a pretext for anything more expensive during their schoolroom days, though Carrie possibly might benefit. Noting her sister's cast-down look, Mrs. Fenlow misinterpreted it as a sign of unavowed mortification at a lost opportunity, and said to console: "Well, one never can tell how anything will turn out. Perhaps this arrangement may be the best for everybody all round, and not only for the Delaneys, who were owed some luck, goodness knows—though I don't see why *you* should have paid them. At any rate, we may as well think so, as it certainly can't be helped now. I daresay it won't make much difference one way or the other in the long run."

Still, notwithstanding this very magnanimous admis-

sion, Mrs. Fenlow continued to feel convinced that the Quins had behaved with much want of common sense, and that she herself was in some degree blameworthy for having by her loquacity helped to make their blunder irretrievable. As it was always her wish to feel that she could say "Quits" when she thought of any people with whom she had had dealings, this conviction annoyed her, and made her resolve to be on the look-out for an opportunity of doing the Craiganogue household some compensating good turn. Such an opportunity was slow to present itself; none, indeed, occurred during the five or six years of her absence in India; but she was equally slow to relinquish the notion, which remained all that time undisturbed at the back of her mind, and eventually had results.

CHAPTER IV

FULLY half a dozen years had passed before Mrs. Fenlow paid another visit to Craiganogue. She reappeared there on a wet day in early spring, jumping briskly off the outside car into a fairly deep puddle, and then tripping over the handle of a rake, which she assured the group awaiting her beneath the porch had been lying in just the same place on the gravel when she left. Her long sojourn under burning skies, among airs tropically fervent, had not abated any of her naturally energetic robustness; rather she seemed to have been refreshed and invigorated. The Craiganogue household had, of course, undergone changes, on which she at once commented with frank brevity. "Stouter and balder—that's what I notice chiefly in you and Charlie," she said to her sister, "and all the young people straggling up more or less. This one—Jack—might be a fair height if he didn't slouch; he wants some drilling. . . . But this must be the little Helveran girl. I forget what you call her. She doesn't look as if she'd ever be any size worth mentioning. Quite a shrimp for six years old, and she can't be much less than that."

"I'm going on for seven in October," Mio said, looking up at her with some sternness, slightly resentful of the damp-gloved thumb pressed under her chin.

"Very fine dark eyes and lashes," Mrs. Fenlow

remarked in a distinctly audible aside over the child's head. "Too good for a shrimp, that doesn't know how to use them. But she's got lots of time for growing and knowing. . . . Your Carrie hasn't begun to roll out yet. Of course, if she takes after the Quins, she's likely to be—well—comfortable."

On hearing herself mentioned, Carrie stared fixedly, in hopes that a compliment might come her way too. But such delightful experiences were not to be won by her bluish-grey eyes, commonplace and small. Her Aunt Mabel merely thought, and, had not some distraction intervened, would probably have said, that she looked stupid and vacant.

Next morning, after breakfast, the mistress of Craignogue, undisturbed by husband or children, talked things over with her sister beside the drawing-room fire. Mrs. Quin had fallen into invalidish ways, spending much of her time on the sofa, from under which her son Fred had crawled six years ago, and she reclined on it now, while Mrs. Fenlow sat up straight, taking notice of things seen within doors and without windows during the pauses of their discourse. She began by regretting her life in India, its amusements and luxury, worth its occasional scorpion and malaria, which she had been obliged to relinquish in the interest of her sons' health and education. This led her on to: "And so you have all your boys at home. What on earth do they do with themselves? And what are you going to do with them? Now that everything's got by cramming, there's no chance unless one begins early. Bob and I settled long ago to put Ned into the Indian Civil, and Bobkins into the Navy; and we shall stick to it, and not waste time by chopping and changing. Why doesn't Charlie pack off a couple of yours to grind for something? It's high time."

"Jack was at a school near Dublin for more than a year," Mrs. Quin said dolefully. "But the food was scandalous, and he only learned to smoke cigarettes. Besides, it cost mints. He's too old now for school, and everybody says that he never could pass the entrance examination at Trinity, even if he wanted to go there, which he doesn't. I don't see that it would be any use, either, unless they taught him some farming, as, of course, he'll have this place to live on, such as it is, eventually."

"Then there's Fred," said Mrs. Fenlow.

"Oh, *he* unluckily has set his mind on the Army, and that seems quite out of the question. He's extremely clever. Mr. Finny, the National school-teacher, who gave them some lessons at one time, said that he had a very retentive memory; and that's just the thing, I should think, that ought to get him a high place at an examination; but, as you say, it all goes by cramming and grinding, and such subjects as modern languages and mathematics. Fred has no turn for them, and neither had Dean Stanley. But he was always wonderfully fond of playing with toy-soldiers, from his earliest days. I remember the figure of the imp, squatted there on the floor, setting out his battles most judgmatically," Mrs. Quin said with pride.

"Oh, my dear, at school he'd soon think there was nothing like football and games of sorts, and be glad enough that he hadn't to toil away like an Army candidate," said Mrs. Fenlow. "It's a poor trade, especially in peaceful times, which we've every prospect of at present. The Indian Civil's far and away a better speculation; but, then, plenty of brains is a *sinecure*. Ned's as sharp as a needle. We'll not have much trouble with him, I think."

"Something will have to be settled about Fred,"

said Mrs. Quin, not desiring that the conversation should turn on Ned's acuteness, "for, of course, he's got entirely beyond poor Miss Brannock's capabilities. It's a mere farce his doing lessons with her."

"I see you've changed your governess," said Mrs. Fenlow. "What became of Miss—What's-her-name—who was with you the last time I stayed here?"

"Miss Farrell? Oh, she married. She went off with a great flourish of trumpets, announcing that her intended had a very important public office, worth untold sums, with a splendid residence attached. And what do you suppose it was?" Mrs. Quin slipped her feet to the floor and sat up suddenly in the enjoyment of her story. "The station-master at Creedy, the second one from Baltinard on the light railway; a wretched little dog-hole of a place, where about two trains stop in the twenty-four hours. There's a queer little shed, no bigger than a cattle-truck, apparently built of old sleepers, which, I suppose, is the splendid residence. Really, one would think that the woman might have had more sense than to tell such obvious untruths. But she always was disposed to give herself absurd airs."

"Her successor seems to be a harmless, quiet sort of creature," said Mrs. Fenlow, "as far as that goes."

"And she has some idea of teaching music," said Mrs. Quin. "Vi and Flossie have improved greatly since she came—Carrie'll never make any hand of it, I think. But I'd like you to hear their last duet. We might look in at the school-room now, if you don't mind, and get them to play it."

Mrs. Fenlow could not well mind, overtly at least, and she was blandly attentive while the two big girls thumpily performed a set of quadrilles, based on airs from *The Barber of Seville*. At the end of them she said: "Well, now, you got through that very nicely, girls; they really

did, Ethel, quite creditably." No such praise could have been allotted by the most complaisant critic to Carrie's attempt, which broke down in dissonant confusion before she had completed the first part of that simple air : " Ah, vous dirai-je, maman ? " while poor Miss Brannock hovered over the instrument, her eyes and mouth round with distress. It was relieved when Mio ascended the music-stool, and though shortness of legs made her balance precarious, besides putting the pedals beyond her reach, contrived with fingers of inadequate-seeming length to make the loose yellow keys sing and almost speak. She played by ear " Silent O Moyle," which was still her favourite tune, although she had lately begun to discover among sundry old music-books many wonderful things, not unlikely to become its rivals. All the listeners were impressed except Carrie, who, subsiding into an obscure nook behind the piano, thought the notes sounded as if they might be either right or wrong, nobody could tell which, and it was easy enough to play that way—like doing a bit of worsted work with no pattern to make mistakes in.

As they left the schoolroom, Mrs. Fenlow remarked to her sister : " That little monkey evidently has some gifts ; you'll soon have to get her better teaching. They say bad teaching's worse than none in music."

Time was when Mrs. Quin would have jumped at such a suggestion, but she did not now welcome it more than doubtfully. " She's not seven yet, you see, and I know Charlie'd say it was all rubbish to suppose that she could want anything more than a nursery governess," she replied in a gloomy undertone, lest the accompanying children should overhear. " We're tighter than usual just now, because the rents have been coming in so badly. But it would certainly be a great matter to have somebody who could ground Gerald in French and Latin. The

Hill-Deanes' youngest boy, who had never been out of the schoolroom at home, got an Intermediate Scholarship worth ever so much at the examinations last year. At any rate, I'll sound Charlie on the subject the next time I have an opportunity," she added more hopefully, as they crossed the hall. "He always says that she has the expression of a balloon-fish trying to whistle, with her mouth pursed up small, and her big round eyes." So poor Miss Brannock, who wished to remain at Craignogue, being much straitened in her choice of residences, need not have congratulated herself on the success of Mio's little recital.

After this Mrs. Fenlow was conducted by a detachment of her nephews and nieces about the pleasure-grounds. They had been laid out some sixty years ago by a Quin whose taste was for the flimsy ornate, expressed mainly through the medium of plaster statuary and rustic arbours. He had so profusely indulged it, that although for many a long day no steps had been taken to stay the dilapidating hand of time, gods and fauns, and urns and vases, were still very frequent, especially in sheltered situations, all more or less crumbled and discoloured, blotched with mouldy damp, and seamed with grimy cracks, in the disreputable-looking decay of their kind. Their surroundings could not vie with them in that, but were not incongruous; ragged straggling shrubs, wispy coarse grass, and weeds hung up in withered brown mats, seemed to offer them suitable garments beneath which to shroud their damaged beauties. In just one place there were traces of an attempted restoration. It was on an oblong grass-plot, backed by a yew hedge, between two stooping arbours, which were prevented from falling prone by networks of ropes. Here fragments of many fallen statues had been collected, and pieced together by some-

body with an ingeniously fantastic imagination, untrammelled by respect for anatomical probabilities; and these reconstructions were consolidated by a liberal use of clay for cement. The result was a group of patched-up monstrosities, queerly and quaintly malformed. Their Frankenstein had been one Michael McEriff, who was working as a boy in the Craiganogue pleasure-grounds at the time when the finishing touches were put to their adornment. His admiration for it all was almost awe-stricken. Emigrating not long afterwards, he carried with him across the Atlantic vivid memories not to be effaced or dimmed. In fact, his prevision of true Paradise was simply Craiganogue, on a somewhat larger scale, perhaps a little glorified, with sunshine gleaming over green sward and white plaster; frequented, indeed, by various superhuman beings, whose notice, if ever he arrived there, he would hope to elude. Then when towards old age he returned unsuccessfully home, his finding of "the grand place gone down altogether" was one of his saddest disillusiones and disappointments. The old master's elderly son gave him gardening jobs, and he, in some degree, consoled himself by these endeavours to rescue and repair. His last illness interrupted them: "Some sort of shape I'd ha' contrived to put on them, if I'd got the time," he said regretfully to Master Bernard, who called to see him. "But, sure, now I think I'd be very content if I had a one of them big crocks that's going to loss there, set up over me in me grave." And, as may be seen to this day, that satisfaction he was not denied. A real snapdragon seed has sown itself on the rim of the sham antique vase, and blossoms gaily from spring to autumn.

Most imposing among Michael's completed works was a figure, predominantly Pan, occupying, on extravagantly long, composite legs, a high pedestal at the middle

edge of the grass plot. Half his pipes had fallen away ; but someone, whether in jest, or with seriously decorative intent, had inverted on his ringleted head a small bowl, part of a perished drinking-fountain. Against the pedestal Charlie Quin was leaning when Mrs. Fenlow came by on her way back to the house alone, as her escort had dispersed to inspect some pigs, in which she did not feel interested. He was smoking a cigarette, and offered one to his sister-in-law, a civility which at Lisdoyle in those days could be shown but half jocularly, and would be literally accepted only by a daring spirit. "Ever smoke one, Mabel?" he said, case in hand.

"Only in public, for the sake of appearances," said Mabel. "Privately, I never can imagine what pleasure anybody finds in such things. A most deadly amusement I should have thought it. I'd rather play on this singular-looking person's pipes than smoke one any day."

Her brother-in-law put the case into his pocket gloomily. "These grotesque old images are rather more or less than a joke to me," he said. "It was that craze of my poor grandfather's that uprooted the foundations of the family's fortunes for good and all."

"I suppose they did cost mints, when they were new," Mrs. Fenlow said, looking about her.

"It wasn't merely what they actually cost," said Charlie. "But that he sold out all his Manavaraya shares, to have the ready money to spend on this rotten folly, just before the great gold finds, which sent the stock up to fabulous prices. Even the very small holders made fine fortunes over it. I couldn't tell you how many thousands the unlucky old duffer just chucked away on that occasion."

"Well, he might have done exactly the same thing

as easily racing, or playing cards, or speculating," Mrs. Fenlow said; "not that that makes any difference."

"I think it does, though," said Charlie. "Such a propensity is worse than any sort of gambling. That, at least, doesn't surround you with hideously visible and substantial consequences surviving from generation to generation—like these lunatic images." He tapped the pedestal with his foot, causing a painty flake to fall off on the grass.

"If I were you," said Mrs. Fenlow, "I'd get the whole lot of them cleared away."

"I've sometimes thought of doing it," said Charlie, "but it would be a matter of some trouble and a little money, so I keep on putting it off until I find myself more energetic and flush of cash, and as neither condition seems at all likely to occur, I daresay they'll stay where they are for my time. Ah! there's the luncheon-bell."

After luncheon, which was of the children's dinner, fat-shoulder-of-mutton and hot-rice-pudding type, Mrs. Fenlow went upstairs to write a letter. On the way she observed the tatterdemalion carpets, and the many large, frayed-edged holes in the linoleum along the passage. The first chair on which she sat down in her room trembled all over so violently that she hastily sought another one, of more stability, though having obviously undergone clumsy amateur repairs. Everything else was correspondingly shabby. The fire had gone out. As she collected her writing materials, a procession of children passed beneath her window, starting on an afternoon walk. They seemed to be all squabbling and scuffling, while Miss Brannock shrieked in peremptory exasperation. Little Mio lagged behind, walking with a limp which suggested chilblains, and looking pinched with cold. Suddenly in Mrs. Fenlow's mind

rose up a contrasting recollection of how she had not long before called with her mother-in-law on Mrs. Armitage and the adopted Alfred Delaney. There came back to her the warmth and brightness of a sitting-room spacious and pretty, blossomy fragrance from an adjoining conservatory; an outlook over lawns and woods. For thus lodged they had found Mrs. Armitage's ward, at the moment of their arrival occupied, with a charming young French girl, in the erection of an elaborate cardboard model, over which they were laughing and talking eagerly. Mrs. Fenlow recalled how strongly she had been impressed by the generally well-conditioned air which had pervaded the small boy, from closely-cropped black hair to shapely-shod feet, as with spontaneous hospitality he produced bonbons and fruit for the entertainment of his visitors. That his dark-grey, straight-browed eyes looked very intelligent, that his smile had a singular charm, and that his manners were uncommonly good, formed part of her reminiscences, which went on to include the fact that Mrs. Armitage had watched him and his doings with evident pride and pleasure. Whereupon, drawing a rapid comparison between the two households, Mrs. Fenlow continued in meditation: "I declare, now, it's the child herself who has a grievance against me, supposing I really helped to settle the matter this way. I rather hope not, for, if so, I kept her out of a good thing, and a better one for a girl than a boy. Clearly Edith Armitage thinks no end of this little Delaney, and is giving him a capital time; but in all probability she'd have taken just as much to Mio Helveran, who'll lose more by having to rough it and getting no spoiling. Of course, she might easily be with far worse people than the Quins. But they certainly are hard up, for one thing, and Ethel naturally makes more of her own children, for another.

Mio's allowance must be a consideration to them, and I daresay they're glad now that they kept her, though it undoubtedly was against her interests, poor little being! However, I may be able to do her a good turn one of these days; and if this present plan of mine comes off, she'll benefit by it to some extent, along with the rest of the family."

And with that Mrs. Fenlow wrote to her mother-in-law.

On the next morning but one she received a reply from Lady Fenlow; and on that same afternoon she communicated the gist of its contents to her sister, whom she called into her room to look at some patterns of knitting-wool. Neither of them was at the moment concerned about knitting-wool, and Mrs. Fenlow did not waste much time on the subject. "I heard this morning from Bob's mother," she said. "No extra charge for sitting down, Ethel."

Mrs. Quin seated herself on the rickety chair, perceiving that she was to be told something. "Did you?" she said.

"Yes. They're at Loganville now, but next month they'll be going to Drisk. You know Sir Robert's got an appointment there—a very good one, I believe," said Mrs. Fenlow. "It's a jolly sort of place, too. She was to have had a niece with her for the summer; she always likes to have a girl to take about; but this one's got engaged, and can't well come. Anyhow, it would be a wasting of opportunities if she did. So my mother-in-law writes that she would be very glad to have your Vi instead."

"Vi!" Mrs. Quin exclaimed with a jump. "Why, she's in the schoolroom."

"She can quite easily come out of it," said Mrs. Fenlow. "She's past seventeen, and has no seniors.

Seriously, Ethel, it's not a chance to throw away. I don't deny that I gave Bob's mother a hint on your behalf; but she was quite agreeable; you needn't have any scruples on that score."

"Oh, it's very good, indeed, of both of you, Mabel," said Mrs. Quin. "Only somehow I hadn't been contemplating any such thing."

"For the matter of that, you might just as well think of bringing out a girl in the Desert of Sahara as here," said Mrs. Fenlow. "But, as I said, Drisk is as different as possible. Always plenty of gaiety going on there. Lots of pleasant, sociable, hospitable people, besides, of course, the garrison. Sir Robert's position will oblige him to entertain a great deal, and they'll be asked everywhere. A summer season, too, will be much the best for a girl like Vi. Garden-parties and picnics and boating and out-of-door diversions generally would be more in her line, I expect, than balls. She's had no proper dancing lessons, has she? Bad dancing doesn't go down, unless a girl is quite exceptionally attractive; but it won't matter if she isn't very proficient at tennis and croquet. She's not shy, and has got plenty to say for herself, and she'll meet any amount of nice young fellows. I should think she ought to get on all right. In fact, Ethel, I shouldn't wonder if she brought you home a son-in-law elect."

"Oh, good gracious, Mabel, *what* a notion!" Mrs. Quin protested, with a queer wistful bashfulness, fluttered and more than half pleased. "The poor child's too young to accuse of such a proceeding. Of course, we can't expect to keep her for ever, but I hope she'll be contented to stay with us yet awhile, and not be over easily pleased. We needn't hurry, goodness knows!"

This seemed to Vi's aunt such fond fatuity that she wished she could express her sentiments thereupon with

more perfect freedom than behoved her. As it was, however, she did not refrain from some plain speaking. "Well now, that's just what *I* think we do need," she said. "To tell you the truth, my dear, in my opinion, if this son-in-law arrives at all, it will be now, or very soon. You see, any good looks that Miss Vi has are simply pig-beauty, as the people say, or *beauté du diable*, if you like it better. She's at her best this minute, or would be if she was smartened up a bit. You may depend upon it she'll never improve. For she takes after all the Moriarty aunts, and you know they, every one of them, grew immense before they were twenty. The uncles used to call them the Seven Sacks, they were such figures of fun. I myself remember Aunt Josephine when she was quite a young girl, and really very like Vi—and just look at her now."

These Moriarty aunts, a numerous tribe of sisters, had been almost contemporaries of Mrs. Quin and Mrs. Fenlow. None of them had married, and the survivors, living compulsorily together on narrow means in a spinsterhood, were viewed by mothers of marriageable daughters much as the leaders of a starting caravan might view traces of casualties along its route. Mrs. Fenlow had selected her object-lesson judiciously, and Mrs. Quin shifted the grounds of what demur she still thought it proper to make. "I wonder whether her clothes and things would come to a great deal," she said. "For, if so, I don't see how we could possibly manage it."

"They wouldn't," Mrs. Fenlow asserted confidently. "A few summer frocks for a girl like her couldn't ruin anybody. You and I'll rig her out between us, Ethel; I've got some muslin things that I brought back from India. They'd do nicely for her, and aren't much use to me over here—pretty, light things, suitable for the young Person." This was an unpremeditated develop-

ment, her original scheme having comprised no such benefaction. But one good turn often leads to another, and the appetite for bestowing favours is whetted by the act of bestowal. Vi's mother accepted it with, at heart, the glee of a child unexpectedly given choice materials for the dress of a beloved doll. It was extremely kind—most extremely kind—of Mabel, she said, and repeated, until her sister, to cut short the disclaimers, which she felt herself making ungracefully, looked out of the window in quest of a diversion, and said: "I see Vi herself out there. Certainly she is not set off at present by her attire. Where on earth did you get her skirt? It hangs so unevenly that it's positively grotesque. And her coat's worse cut than anything I ever beheld. . . . I wonder what she'll think of her new prospects? I suppose she'll be highly delighted."

Delight is a term hardly solemn enough to describe the feelings with which Vi received the communication of this impending change. It was made to her in the course of the following day, and appeared to her little less portentous than the revelation of a new heaven and a new earth. So bewildering, so amazing, for the moment, was the outlook opened to her, who had seen nothing more festive loom on her horizon than a Church Missionary Sale of Work at the schoolhouse about Easter, with perhaps a freshly-trimmed-up hat to wear on the occasion. As all the glories of her wonderful fortune unfolded themselves before her in detail, a rapturous ecstacy began to rise, and gradually overflowed her mind. Probably it had reached its height when she made her appearance, breathless, with shining eyes at the schoolroom door:

"Oh, do you know, Miss Brannock," she said. "Do you know, Flossie—I'm coming out. I'm going to Drisk with the Fenlows, for ever so long. There'll be all sorts

of parties and everything. I wish you were coming, too, but, of course, you're only fifteen. I'm to have a lot of new things from Dublin, or maybe London—Aunt Mabel's to get some of them. . . . And I'll not be at tea this evening, Miss Brannock. I'm to dine late."

CHAPTER V

VI QUIN set out on her adventures one April morning, when the world was all freshly green and blue and white, with blossoms that seemed down-dropped wreaths of cloud, and clouds that seemed floating drifts of blossom. New clothes, hair carefully dressed, and a suddenly intensified pleasure in life, had embellished her so perceptibly, that Mrs. Fenlow, who was to escort her southward, pronounced her to be looking quite pretty. As she sprang to her seat on the outside car, about which the shabby group of stay-at-homes was gathered, she might have been likened to a gaily-plumaged bird, soaring away from among a flock more dingily feathered. Kate Hely, the cook, remarked in fat, gruff tones that it looked like as if Miss Vi was starting off to her wedding, and went on to express a belief that there would be a one in it before they were much older, anyway. Overhearing which prediction, Miss Vi's mother and aunt involuntarily exchanged glances.

After this departure the stream of life at Craiganogue rolled along through a spring and summer which were, on the whole, rather duller than usual for most of its inhabitants. To Mio Helveran, on the contrary, the period was one of increased interest and enjoyment. The state of things in general had improved for her

during the past half-year. An ill-tempered nursery-maid, flouncing off without notice after a quarrel with Mrs. Lee, had not been replaced, and this affront to her own dignity, through the reduction of the nursery establishment, had before very long brought about the quitting of Mrs. Lee herself. That was not accomplished, it is true, without a disagreeable, preliminary interval of indecision and discontent. Mrs. Lee made Mio a listener, reluctant enough, to recitals of her grievances. Often she was called upon to hear how Mrs. Lee would never have thought or believed it of a family for which she herself had been slaving better than twelve year, and in which her father's brother had worked about the stables for times untold. The fact of the matter was that the mind of the mistress had been poisoned against her by them who had the ignorance to suppose the head-nurse in a gentleman's house would take upon herself to light the nursery fire, or put up with waiting half the morning till a great lazy *stronsach* like Lizzie M'Evoy saw fit to streeel upstairs. But she wasn't one who would demean herself to be stopping in any place where so little was made of her. There were plenty of people as good as the Quins that had their nurseries waited on foot and hand, and would be glad to have the chance of putting a respectable woman in charge of them. "And wouldn't they do very right, Miss Mio? Or did you ever see me neglecting my duties, since you come here a couple of months old?" These complaints and appeals distressed and embarrassed Mio, especially when her hair was being brushed, so that she could not escape. Furthermore, her Aunt Ethel developed a habit of sending by her unpleasant messages to Mrs. Lee, who had fallen into disfavour; and Mio dearly hated the errand, though she would soften down its purport to the best of her childish discretion.

Eventually, however, Mrs. Lee, retiring discomfited, took up her abode with a married son and daughter-in-law in the neighbourhood, and Mio was much relieved. Notwithstanding that some inevitable regrets followed a lifelong acquaintance and fairly good friend, the gain on the side of liberty far more than counterbalanced any loss. As Mrs. Lee had no successor, all nursery rule fell into abeyance ; and liberty Mio enjoyed with the peculiar zest reserved for those who are habitually submissive to circumstances. Then, soon after Vi's taking wing Mrs. Quin had an illness, tedious rather than serious, through which Miss Brannock attended her assiduously from mixed motives, a wish to be kind co-operating with a wish to be indispensable. Hence schoolroom supervision, never by any means strict, became still more lax. Mio revelled in long, undisturbed researches among the dusty shelves of the unfrequented book-room. Here, one day, she lighted on a volume in strong orange-yellow covers, which was called "Jane Eyre," and which she proceeded to study after a fashion of her own. That is to say, skimming in rapid flight over vast unintelligible tracts, some instinct would lead her to settle on the places where she could at least partially understand what she read. In the present case these were chiefly the lurid appearances of the horrible maniac wife, culminating in her nocturnal visit to Jane, and destruction of the wedding veil. This lecture caused her many a bad dream.

Some of her other researches into English literature entailed upon her even less happy experiences. From an obscure corner she drew forth, cautiously for fear of spiders, a few small old books, mostly in marbled paper bindings with brown leather backs, which had belonged to bygone generations of juvenile Quins. A fat and dumpy specimen which Mio examined, having first dis-

gustedly rid its edges of cobwebs and ghastly skeletons, was a collection of what to twentieth-century children would seem dreary little tracts, illustrated by mildly comic smudgy caricatures. The subject of these engravings considered, such a view would, indeed, ascribe to them a strong element of profanity. Mio began with a tale entitled "The Churchyard Prattler," the frontispiece of which represented a small boy in a pinafore and chimney-pot hat sitting on a tombstone. His story related how he had been sent out by his mother, provided with a piece of string as long as himself, and instructed to measure all the graves, that he might ascertain how many were shorter than he. On the results of this enlivening investigation he enlarged at much length, so ran the story, and his moralizings were finally summed up in a sprightly, though not strictly grammatical, little rhyme :

" Oft may be found
A grassy mound,
'Neath a yew-tree,
Much less than me,
It seems to cry :
Prepare to die !"

Dull and depressing Mio found this ingenious attempt to improve her grand-parents' minds ; it bored her considerably, but did not appal her in the least. The injunction, " Prepare to die," had no more relevancy for her than an order to " Port helm " would have for a landsman on shore. She thought that if the next story was as stupid, she would try another book. The next story was called, " A Child in a Pet," and the child stamped furiously, depicted on the title-page. A little girl, prone to violent rages, in the middle of one had been seized with a fit, and had fallen down dead. Her subsequent fate was minutely described, all in words of one syllable, which constrained the use of some quaint

phrases in recounting the frightful facts. They told of fiery torment for ever and ever ; and the conclusion was : " She is now in her pet in Hell." A black horror seized hold of Mio's imagination as she read. These ideas came to her with the emphatic impressiveness of unfamiliarity. Despite her two or three years' attendance at Feristown Church, scanty light had for her been thrown on our future destinies. The indistinct enunciation of the old Rector, her habit of abstractedly pursuing her own lines of thought, and the extremely early age at which she had become accustomed to sit in dreamy patience among reiterated meaningless sounds—all combined to make her a member of the congregation who heard little and heeded less. At home her opportunities of acquiring knowledge were equally limited. Miss Brannock being a Catholic, religious instruction had no place in the schoolroom curriculum, and Mio seldom took up the subject on her own account. From her occasional references to her fragrant Church Service she had derived an impression that there would some time or other come a Day of Judgment, attended by wailing and gnashing of teeth. But a Day of Judgment was, she assumed, entirely an affair for her elders to deal with, and did not concern anybody else. She had not hitherto troubled herself about it at all. Now, however, this anecdote, which told in childish language of a childish misdemeanour and its sequel, suddenly roused her to a sense of strong personal interest in the matter. It was such a poignantly painful sense that to shake it off she turned over several pages, in quest of a diversion, but with unhappy results ; for they brought her to a circumstantial account of Elisha and the naughty children and the she-bears. The compilation was, in fact, a sort of biblical " Struwel-Peter," grimmer, though perhaps less disgusting, than that repulsive barbarian work. In

its coarse black lines the accompanying wood-cut realized the scene with some crude force. Out of the thicket broke the big shaggy bears at a lumbering trot; to and fro rushed the terrified infants, in grotesque attitudes of helpless panic; while the prophet, bald and long-bearded, stood complacently by, to watch the dispersion, limb meal, of his youthful enemies. Nor less worthily did the letterpress rise to the height of its great argument, soaring up at the end, on the wings of Dr. Watts, into the loftier regions of divine songs:

" But God soon stopped their wicked breath;
He sent two raging bears,
Which tore them limb from limb to death,
With blood and groans and tears."

As Mio spent the greater part of the afternoon over narratives of the same edifying type, drawn on from one to another by an irresistible fascination, it was natural enough that she should go to her bed with a mind still possessed by those new fears. For a very long time she lay awake and trembled at them, magnified and multiplied under the evil spells of the dark hours. She could see no possibility of supposing herself to be in a state which would exempt her from such retribution as had overtaken the young sinners whose dreadful fate she had learned. True it was, indeed, that she had never been given to dancing and stamping in rages, and that she had never even thought of addressing rude personal remarks to people whom she met on her walks abroad. But not very long since she had called Maria Fahy, the housemaid, a stupid fat donkey for throwing away a cherished collection of scarlet-rimmed lichen-cups. And then there must be ever so many bad things which she had said and done, and forgotten all about, but which were every one written down, as she had read,

by a dreadful old angel in a big black book, that people might remember them against her when the time came. No, she could not by any means persuade herself that she was not highly likely sooner or later—to-morrow or next day it might be—to join the little girl in her pet, and the jeering children, or what remained of them after the hideous savagery of the bears.

This murky trouble woke and rose up with Mio on the following morning, and overshadowed her for many days. During them she continued to study the dumpy tract-book, with others of a like tendency, and she read in her mother's Bible much about the wrath of God, and the accursedness of his enemies, and the lakes of fire and brimstone and outer darkness prepared for their reception. There were also, she found, honours and glories for the good people, but in these arrangements she took far less interest ; they seemed to her unattractive and unreal. She was not at all sure that, except as a means of escaping worse quarters, she wished to go to Heaven ; but she did, without doubt, wish most earnestly not to go to Hell, and upon that accordingly her meditations chiefly turned. The subject weighed so heavily on her mind that she drooped both in body and spirits, until Mrs. Quin and Miss Brannock agreed in remarking that she was looking peaky, and ate next to nothing. Of course, she kept the matter strictly to herself, following the inborn instinct which ever conceals our dearest dread and desire ; an instinct which we may in varying degrees outgrow, sometimes to our sorrow. If she had confided in any of her elders, she would hardly have met with anything that could have exorcised her fears.

The refuge to which she did betake herself lay still among books, old favourites mainly, with two or three fortunate finds to boot. Some fairy-tales there were and ancient Greek myths, which had been so familiar to

her ever since before she remembered anything at all, that they seemed like part of her mind. Yet she never tired of them. Nor did they in any wise shock and dismay her, sensational and tragical as were often their contents. Though enormous dragons breathed flame from seven mouths, though witches and ogres and demi-gods and demons wrought deeds of superhuman cruelty and vengeance, they caused her no waking terrors, no haunted dreams. Their appearances on the scene gave her a kind of joy, not diminishing her pleasure in the more agreeable personages, mermaids, elves, heroes, wood-nymphs, fairy princes. To the tried friends of these "tales and antique histories," and some others in a newly-discovered volume of Grimm, she now turned for relief from her burden of crushing despondency, and did not turn in vain, albeit she could not expect a more than temporary respite. From those enchanted regions she would presently emerge into a world where she walked beneath thunderous glooms, the menacing scowl of its Maker.

One day, however, it happened that she was hunted out of the house by Miss Brannock, who, passing the book-room door, caught a glimpse of her ensconced in a corner, and declared that she would be much better running about with the others in the fresh air than moping there on such a lovely fine morning. Mio went with acquiescent reluctance, mitigated by the retention of her beloved "Tanglewood Tales," stuck into a pocket of her pinafore, but instead of running about with anybody, she sat down in the shade of a haycock at the top of a sloping field. Here she immediately resumed her reading. It was the story she liked best of all, about Perseus and Pegasus and Bellerophon, and, propped against the yielding side of the fragrant silvery-green lapcock, she speedily returned to the Greek mountain

height, whence she could look up and up into the glistening dark-blue hollow, until she caught a far-off glimpse of snowy wings, which were not any bird's.

Just as she was reaching the point when they would come into sight, she dropped her book with a start, and sat bolt upright as if she had heard some strange sound. But, in fact, a thought had stirred her. Suddenly it had occurred to her that what she was reading was not true. There never had been any such winged horse as Pegasus; nor any such man as Perseus with his magical gifts, and his Gorgon's head, with the help of which he was going to rescue poor Andromeda from the sea-monster—only that part had not come yet. There never was any girl fastened to the rock, nor any monster to devour her. Nobody believed it; somebody had just made it all up, and the rest of the nice stories, too. She did not believe them herself, any more than she believed the things she invented about strange people and other creatures, that all the while she knew were nowhere and never had been anywhere in the world; and no more than she believed what seemed to happen in the dreams, which turned into nothing the minute she woke up, as she sometimes was so glad to do. Yet these stories were all printed in books, ever so many books, and while one was reading them, they seemed as real as a sort of dream where one only looked on; and afterwards they turned into nothing, too, like a dream, until the next time one read them. But if the stories in these different books were not true, she hastened on eagerly to the conclusion of her argument, it was not a bit likely that the stories in that black Bible book were true either; and if they were not—why, then there wasn't really any God in a rage up somewhere out of sight above the sky. For it was out of that one book that all the stories about Him came; how He set she-bears on children, and made the

earth swallow people up alive, and shut them up in fiery darkness for dreadful ages and ages, that she couldn't help thinking of when she was lying awake ; and how He had once drowned the whole world, and nearly everybody, in a great flood, and is going some day to burn it all with flames of fire. This reminded her of a wasps'-nest with which last year she had seen Linders the gardener dealing. First, he had lit some queer-smelling stuff which he had left blazing and smoking close to it for a while, after which he had thrown it into a bucket, and poured water on it out of a watering-pot. The wasps, she reflected, might have thought Linders rather like God, though *His* flood, of course, came before the fire. But now she would never mind these Bible stories again, and lie awake at night thinking miserably of what dreadful things were sooner or later to befall herself and Jack and Carrie, and everybody else. She would be as foolish to do that as she would be if she expected to see a mermaid come flopping along the avenue, or Jack the Giant Killer striding down the side of Knock-eevin over yonder in his seven-leagued boots.

As thoughts of this nature, less tidily arrayed, sped through her mind, she felt that a heavy weight had been shaken off it, and that a murky shadow had scudded away. Tilting back her dark head, she lifted up a small face, in which the eyes only were large, to the midsummer blue, and gazed most earnestly into the depths of its impenetrable clearness. But she was not looking for anything. On the contrary, she was feeling the sort of relief which might have been experienced by an unusually intelligent small chicken at the discovery that birds of prey did not exist. Her reflections were that, after all, there was nothing up in the beautiful coloured sky, except the clouds, and the moon and stars, when it grew dark enough to see them. A great empty place,

widening out beyond and beyond, if one thought of it, until it made one feel lonesome ; but then there was no need to think of it longer than one liked ; it seemed just a sort of roof over their heads, and as pretty as speedwell flowers. If it was enormously big, what matter, supposing it did spread itself out all round for ever and ever ?

In the joy of her new release from the cage of fear which had caught her, she was disposed to say what matter ? and what harm ? about her whole world, with the daring spirit of an unmolested wren ; so no longer requiring her book as a shelter from grievous care, she repocketed "Tanglewood Tales," and set off for a walk down the hay-field lawn. Though she was rather fond of singing to herself, she had not done so for many days past, but now she began a tune, which she had heard at the Howly Place, and thought she would have liked, if it had been all tune and no voices. It was the Old Hundredth, and as she went light-heartedly on her way, she improvised to it words, which she sang over and over again, with few variations :

"It is not true, it is not true,
It's all a lie, it's all a lie.
There's no such thing, there's no such thing ;
It's all a lie, a great big lie."

Presently, sauntering along crooning her *non credo*, she came where the lawn bordered on the pleasure grounds and a gateway with a gate off its hinges led into them. Here she ceased her stroll, but not her song, to poke out of his dwelling with a grass-blade the greenish, black-eyed inhabitant of a large cuckoo-spit on a nettle leaf, when she was startled out of both occupations by a voice close at hand saying : "That's a quare discription of a lilt you have, Miss Mio. I never heard them words to the_ould psalm-tune in the_House of God, Tall

the years I'm going in it." This was very old Dan Loughlin, who emerged from behind a guelder-rose bush.

"Was it in a Bible that you saw the stories about Him, Dan?" Mio inquired with curiosity, ignoring his criticism on her improvisation. The opportunity seemed to her a good one for confirming the truth of her theory without delay. Perfectly certain she felt that old Dan would not mention any other source. And in fact: "Why, to be sure, Miss Mio, where else would I?" he said. "Good Protestants the Loughlins are, and as apt, I should suppose, to be reading their Bibles as e'er another."

"Well, you know, it's just a book like all the rest of them, only not so nice," Mio said cheerfully. "*I* don't intend to read it any more, except maybe Joseph and his brethering, and his dreams, and the sacks. I like that, but, of course, I don't believe a word of any of it."

Old Dan looked at her for a moment with a solemn, puzzled countenance, which gradually took on an expression of aggrieved concern. Then he said: "May goodness forgive me for saying so, Miss Mio, but you have the talk of a great hethen. Well, now, it's a mislucky thing to be seeing poor Miss Mina's young daughter brought up no better than an eetheist, and she herself not any such long while back teaching her class of school-children, as regular as the Lord's Day come round. I dunno what people's thinking of, or where their portion's like to be." His voice had a gruff resonance which made it sound, so Mio thought, as if he always talked with his head in a large empty jug, but on this occasion it was also marked by a tone of resentful reproach. Mio stood looking after him as he walked away, gauntly tall, with his scuffle over his stooping shoulder. Then she turned into a shrubby path leading towards the house. At the door of the kitchen yard she came upon

Kate Hely, the cook, holding a pink-rimmed dish, piled with a slippery heap of herrings, just purchased from a peripatetic fish-woman. The sun drew metallic gleams from their scales, along with a distinctly fishy odour. "Them haymakers," Kate explained, "ate every egg in the world on me; so I'm after buying a bit of fish for the kitchen dinner."

"They must have looked very pretty swimming about in the water," Mio remarked, "and I suppose it would drown the queer smell they have."

"As for the looks of them, Miss Mio," said Kate, "I hates the sight of them meself, and so does the lads. But it was all I could do for the dinner, like it or lump it."

"Why couldn't you have mutton or cold beef?" Mio suggested.

"And it Friday, and to-morrow a saint's day, to the back of that, Miss Mio," said Kate. "It's not mutton nor yet beef we've any right to be aiting."

"I shouldn't have thought the saints would mind what people had for dinner," said Mio. "It can't make any difference to them. How would they know, Kate? Would they smell the herrings frying?"

"You're the comical child, Miss Mio," said Kate, "but it's the comical fool's trick I'd be playing if I took upon meself to risk landing our souls in Purgatory, let alone Hell—God be good to us!—for the sake of a bit of mate."

"I wonder do you believe that there really *are* any such places as Hell and Fairyland, Kate?" Mio said, looking up gravely at her.

Kate was seriously shocked. She had been made very familiar in her childhood with the teachings of an elementary eschatological work which compressed into a small compass a wonderful deal of terrorizing information. At that moment there rose vividly in her recollec-

tion one particular anecdote called "The Red-Hot Bonnet," and a glow which might have been reflected from this portentous headgear came into her face as she indignantly replied: "Whethen now, Miss Mio, what sort of an ould Turk do you take me for, at all, to be asking me the likes of that? It's the bad Catholic I'd be if I knew no better than to start misbelieving about Hell. Right enough I believe in it, glory be to God!—and blessing meself I'd be, only for me hands full of the fish. Well, to be sure, it's the ignorant bringing up Protestants do be giving their childer; but that beats everything, Miss Mio, you to be wondering about Hell. 'Deed, how to keep theirselves out of it is all the wonders people has a right to wonder in the matter."

Kate carried off her dish across the yard, still indignant, as was perceptible from her way of flouncing along; while Mio stood looking after her, for the second time aware that she herself had somehow given offence by throwing doubts on the truth of the stories in the black Bible books. Though these two incidents did not by any means shake her confidence in her discovery, seeing that she regarded neither Old Dan nor Kate as a person whose opinion was valuable, they did dispose her to keep her own views on the matter to herself, and she pursued that course thenceforward. She had never been in the habit of mentioning such subjects, and had always covertly maintained a critical attitude towards her elders' judgments, so she found no difficulty in refraining from consulting them. Rather she derived some pleasure from the consciousness of having a secret, one peculiar perhaps to herself, and likely, if known, to make people think her pretty wicked. The ugly little old story-books she thrust back into their cobwebby corner, grimly remarking that the spiders might read them until their legs dropped off with fright; and she revisited that

shelf no more. It was not, indeed, in the nature of things that she should be set free from all fears. There were still ghosts, and people like Dinny the Jigger, and cross, bouncing, barking dogs; but, comparatively speaking, all such alarms were merely trivial matters. Nor was she greatly afflicted by the crux to which she now reverted at times when she lay awake, or sat compulsorily unoccupied, the impossibility, that is, of imagining how time either ever began or never began. Notwithstanding that the utter inscrutability of the question seemed to her somewhat awful, as she pondered it, baffled and bewildered, it contained none of the hideous menaces which had appalled her in her theological meditations. It was the difference between a wide clear sky, empty and silent, and one filled with clouds composed of noxious reptiles, insects and other repulsive creatures, ready to drop overwhelmingly on her head. Her perplexity would have been increased had it become known to her that there are persons who for choice would people their skies with the like, rather than with nothing at all.

CHAPTER VI

BUT Mio did not spend all the summer days in theological studies, or in any species of literary pursuit. She took part sometimes in more active bodily exercises, along with a livelier companion than had usually fallen to her lot. Flossie Quin, in the absence of her nearer contemporary Vi, turned for company to the two little girls, often joining them in their excursions out of doors. This enabled them to ramble further than they could otherwise have done unforbidden, as Flossie's years were considered discreet enough to keep herself and her comrades out of bog-holes, rivers and fields likely to be dangerously inhabited. She was a good-humoured, easily-satisfied young person, wont to take things as she found them, neither making extravagant claims on her own behalf nor aggrieved at what circumstances tendered for her acceptance. Her willingness to strum the humdrum second part when she and her sister performed their duet might seem prophetically symbolical of a destiny to play second fiddle through life in a contented spirit. As things were now, this accommodating disposition made her easily condescend to the lower estate of mere children like Carrie and Mio, and interest herself in their more elementary pastimes. In her heart she thoroughly enjoyed sailing small fleets on the brook at the bottom of the lawn, though she was

understood to superintend the proceedings solely with a view to the prevention of accidents. Mio took far more pleasure in diversions of the kind under her cousin's régime, than she had done in the days of the nursery officials: for Flossie, easy-going and unimaginative, never darkened the horizon with predictions of anything worse than wet feet, or some such quite limited calamity.

Among the amusements of that season, visits to ex-nurse Mrs. Lee at Mallymaquilty Farm were much in favour. Her domicile with the young Paddy Lees had turned out more happily than arrangements of the sort are very apt to do; so finding herself comfortably situated, her sense of ill-usage by the Craiganogue family faded away, and amicable relations were restored between them. It became one of her pleasures to entertain her former charges at afternoon tea, and the pleasure was mutual, all the more because Mrs. Paddy, hospitably falling in with her wishes, produced griddle-cakes of an excellence so unsurpassed, and so highly appreciated, that a marked want of appetite for plates of thick bread-and-butter might have been perceived at the schoolroom evening meal. Their fame reached Gerald's ears, which he pricked up greedily; and on the occasion of the next visit he announced that he supposed he would have to go and see poor old Lee some day or another. It proved to be not another but that very afternoon, despite the semi-nursery character of the party and the near approach of his thirteenth year. At the farm he did, indeed, account for his presence by explaining that he had thought it better to see the kids through the Five-Bush Field, in case Ryan should have any young beasts grazing there. But Mrs. Lee welcomed him delightedly on his own terms, for he had always been her favourite, because he was only six months old when she came to Craiganogue. Next to him she set Miss Vi, because she

and her own little girl that had died were just the one age, all to three days. The news of Miss Vi's departure to share in the gaieties of Drisk deeply interested Mrs. Lee, and set her thoughts, like Kate Hely's, running on matrimony. "It wouldn't be very long before they'd hear tell that some gay young officer was after setting his heart on Miss Vi, and the next word would be that they were about getting married."

To these prognostications Carrie would listen rather morosely, maintaining a glum silence, while Flossie and Mrs. Lee expatiated on the beauties of the outfit which had been provided for the season at Drisk, a topic of inexhaustible interest. For Carrie, curiously enough, was far more inclined to resent Vi's sudden and dazzling promotion than Flossie, who, so much nearer in age, might have been expected to regard it from a more personal point of view. It seemed all the less reasonable in Carrie, seeing that her social gifts fell decidedly below the average even of what may be generally assumed in persons not quite eleven. Her family often frankly assured her that she always "made a great gawk of herself, when there were any strange people about." But she herself remained invariably convinced that only some accidental circumstances had hindered her from brilliantly shining. Therefore, she cast envious glances at the opportunities now enjoyed by her eldest sister.

On the afternoon when Gerald first joined the farm tea-party, her spleen moved her to speech. Flossie was still talking about Vi's clothes. "Some of her things were got from the *Debuttants'* Department at Walshes' in Dublin. Of course, Miss Vi is what they call a *Debuttant* now," she explained to Mrs. Lee.

"The mistress would be sure to see that she had everything elegant, and she entering into society," Mrs. Lee said, with a touch of solemnity in her tone, and at

the back of her mind a thought that if things had turned out differently, she herself might have been considering about eligible matches for her own little Molly. "I daresay there'll be none in it nicer dressed or nicer looking."

"The next orders, Mother," said Mrs. Paddy, who was listening with interest as she handed round a plateful of hot buttery cakes, "is apt to be the wedding-gown, and bridesmaids' frocks for Miss Flossie and Miss Carrie. And may we all be there to see."

Mrs. Paddy had designed the remark to please everyone. But Carrie rejoined bitterly, with a wrathful running together of her syllables into as few separate words as possible: "I'm sure I wouldn't care a pin to have people asking me to marry them just because I was dressed up finely. *Anybody* would look nice then."

"*You* wouldn't," Gerald observed, as distinctly impolite as a mouthful of griddle-cake permitted. "If you had on all the grand clothes that ever were, you'd just stand gawking about, like a gaby, with your boot-laces strelling about, and your hair all in rats' tails."

"Rats' tails yourself!" Carrie retorted furiously and pointlessly. "At any rate, *I* haven't got big freckles all over the backs of my hands."

Their altercation, however, went no further, being interrupted by Mio, who said reflectively: "If anybody ever marries me, I hope it will be a fiddler with a lovely new fiddle, that he'll lend me to play on every day, and teach me all manner of tunes."

The desirability of such an alliance had been suggested to her by another event of this memorable sixth summer of hers, which was bringing her so many novel experiences. She had made the acquaintance of Mick Moynihan, the

lame fiddler, who had begun to frequent the end of the cow-lane adjoining the house-yard. It was so long since his last visit to the neighbourhood that Mio could have no recollection of having ever seen him before, more than half her lifetime ago. But her elders were well used to his reappearances at intervals of three years or so, and understood that between whiles he had been hobbling and fiddling through the length and breadth of Ireland. A crippling accident in early youth had put out of his power more ordinary occupations, from which he was debarred by being unable to get about except with a queer troublesome-looking limp, twisting himself at every step half round a long stick. It seemed a spiteful trick of his destiny to decree so much walking for one who accomplished his journeys with apparently such painful exertions. But Mick did, in fact, experience more pleasure and less hardship on his wanderings than a spectator would have supposed. He swung himself along bodily with a knack easier than it looked, and mentally he was curious and interested about the scenes he passed through in a degree which substantially diminished the weariness of the way. His musical performances also were a source of joy and some pride to him, quite apart from the pennies and other emoluments that they brought in. For music he had an intense love, and talent enough to have repaid expert training, had it ever come within his reach, as it never did. The genius that burns its way through obstruction, like a spark through a rick, he did not possess; still, he would not allow his bit of a gift completely to fust in him unused. He practised with diligence, not seldom under difficult conditions, and at times when his wish, though not his prevailing will, was to take his ease, and disregard the "limbering" of his fingers and wrists. By dint of long, self-imposed penury he amassed the means of buying a

fairly good fiddle, which he cherished as fondly as if it had been a thing of rarely prized life. For the sake of his art he even declined persistently to adopt the two sticks or crutches, often recommended as likely to smooth his progress. The use of them, he said, "put his hand out for the playing," so he preferred his one staff, disposed according to an awkward arrangement of his own, and entailing on him a slow, ungainly gait.

When it periodically brought him, after devious rambles through the country, back to his native village Lissenglen, he always tarried there for some time, among near neighbours and, nowadays, distant kin; for his own generation were scattered far and wide. The new one had begun to speak of him as Ould Mick. During his stay he would frequently visit the kitchen quarters of Craiganogue, his ostensible object being Kate Hely, who was sister's niece to his cousin-in-law, Fergus O'Carroll, the Moynihans and Helys having married through one another time out of mind. Anyhow, Mick and his tunes were welcome to the whole household, who made him kindly welcome to whatever refreshments might be going. On a hollowy, swarded bank beside the cow-lane, backed by a thorny hedge and a clump of ash-trees, his habit was to sit and rest, and sometimes practise; so here he often fell in with the young Quins as they went to and fro. Their renewal of a former acquaintance seemed to them an event of no great magnitude, though extracts from Mick's wayfaring adventures were a useful resource when time was hard to fill up satisfactorily. But for Mio the matter had far more importance, as it was the occasion of her establishing a friendship with not only the fiddler but his fiddle. It was the instrument that fixed her attention, as she stood among her cousins, who, grouped about Mick, requested yarns and tunes. When he played, she crept very close to him, and kept a wide-

eyed watch on the sliding bow, and the fingers that pressed the strings, gazing as earnestly as she had gazed at the alphabet letters, by which she was to learn her way into the world of books. While he talked, she examined the fiddle, if possible, more minutely, and at last one day ventured to lay upon it an investigating hand. So warily did she touch it, however, and with apparently such understanding, that its owner, who, as a rule, would rather have had a finger in his eye than see his fiddle handled by anybody, let alone an imp of a child, actually encouraged her proceedings, and set about an explanation of its use and structure. This led to his giving her illustrations, first, of his art, which were followed by theoretical lectures on it, and then by practical lessons, until a supreme moment came when she was permitted to take the sliding bow in her own tremulous hand, and try herself to make the strings speak.

Mick Moynihan declared that the little young lady had a great notion of playing entirely, considering the size of her hands; sure, the two fists of her would fit in the one hen egg. His interest and pride in his pupil caused him to spend many a half-hour in supervising her efforts, and in those summer days the cow-lane was haunted ever and anon by uncanny sounds, doleful as were ever uttered "by woman wailing for her demon lover." But this did not last very long. Mio's cousins soon left off their attendance at the music-lessons, as she passed beyond the stage of those grotesque shrieks and howls, with which the most eminent virtuoso who ever flourished has no doubt begun his artistic career. Before many weeks had gone by she was, as Mick said, "making a very good offer at 'Rory O'More,'" and within another fortnight he hobbled off to fetch Kate Hely and Maggie Dowdall from the kitchen, that they

might hear Miss Mio playing "The Minstrel Boy"—
"real grand: I could do it no better meself."

Mio's dearest wish may have seemed at that moment to have blossomed fulfillingly. But such wishes often contain the seeds of successors; and from this one sprang another very naturally and swiftly. It was for a fiddle of her own. Certainly there could be no more delightful possession than a fiddle that she could carry about with her, and play on whenever she liked, repeating the hard bits over and over again until she felt that the notes would come as surely and readily as water running along in a river. And she would have plenty of time to find out all the tunes she ever wanted to play—piano-tunes and song-tunes. Perhaps she might be able to play one like the tame thrush's, the one that he sang every evening sitting on the shoulder of the headless statue of Hercules under the schoolroom window. Now she could only have the loan of Mick's fiddle for a little short while, and not every day. But when Mick set off on his tramps again, as he said he was bound to be doing very presently, she would have no fiddle at all; nothing except the old piano, with half its notes sticking, and the rest of them rattling so loud. A fiddle of her own, however, seemed beyond her reach, as utterly as if it had been hung up on a nail somewhere in the Seventh Heaven. Utterly, indeed, and hopelessly, were it not that a strong wish will quest and scent about like a lost dog trying to pick up a trail, and by hope alone is led on brief runs hither and thither.

"Where did you get this fiddle, Mick?" Mio inquired one day, seated on the grassy bank towards sunset, when through the fir-grove over the way long clear rays had begun to pierce like the golden strings of some great lyre.

"Sure, at McBride's place in Tumpane Row, Miss Mio,

that's off Patrick Street in the City of Cork," said Mick, who was adjusting the straps of the fiddle's American-cloth bag.

"Was it a *very* dear fiddle?" asked Mio.

"Well now, dear or cheap," Mick said, taking it gently from her, "is according as people think. I'd be sorry to say I was after giving a penny too much for her. But it was a deal more shillings than you have years to your age, Miss Mio; a deal more, and double as many after that again."

Although Mio was, in truth, sadly disconcerted by the mention of what struck her as a terribly vague and long price, unattainable by any saving of chance pennies, she felt instinctively that it would not beseem her anxiously to discuss money matters with Mick Moynihan; so she merely remarked, as she handed him the bow: "I'm sure it's a splendid kind of fiddle."

Thus one track, at least, was proved to be not worth pursuing.

But now, in the course of that quarrelsome tea-party at Mallymaquilty Farm, another possibility occurred to her. It was only a few months since she had come in for her great-grand-aunt's legacy; and it suddenly occurred to her that perhaps the old broken fiddle, which everybody thought good for nothing, might be mended, after all. *They* knew nothing about fiddles. She would show it to Mick Moynihan, and he might know how to fix it up again. Once she had seen him putting new strings into his fiddle, and it had looked as if it had all come to pieces, though he said: "No fear but she was as right as a trivet." Mick might still be in the cow-lane when they got back. Mio hoped so eagerly, and was impatient to set off, not appreciating the big dish of large red raspberries, suave and fragrant, which prolonged the repast. She was better pleased by the appearance of a

murky cloud, whose scowl suggested even to Mrs. Lee's hospitable mind that the children "might have a right to start away home before it settled to rain cats and dogs on them."

Nearing the house, Mick Moynihan's voice was to be heard outside the kitchen door, and Mio excitedly requested Carrie's assistance in conveying the violin-case down from the lumber-room. It was too unwieldy for her to manage without help. Carrie, whose temper was still suffering from the rats' tails and boot-laces incident, did not refuse, chiefly because she thought that, failing her, Mio would probably apply to beastly Gerald; and the battered black case reached the yard just in time to catch Mick as he stood taking leave. The moment may not have been a very propitious one—it is hardly within the bounds of a six-year-old patience to wait on propitious moments, for Mick was in a hurry to step along with himself, before the night set in teeming wet. At any rate, his examination of the decrepit old instrument was rather superficial, and the result altogether unfavourable to Mio's hopes. He said that it was every atom of it ruined entirely; no good whatsoever. "Mend it up, Miss Mio? Ah, not at all; there'd be no use wasting your time trying. You'd as aisy put any sort of a shape on a handful of carpenter's chips. Ne'er another note anybody'll ever get out of the ould creature. All you can do with it is just let it alone."

So the little girls carried it back again upstairs. On the way, Carrie, who was cross, took occasion to say disagreeably: "I can't think why anybody should care about twiggling-twaggling on an old fiddle, like a rusty gate squeaking. If it was a band, now, it would be *something*. The one I heard at Westport was twice as loud as forty old fiddles. Don't be shoving that way against the banisters, Mio; not that it would matter if

we did drop the rubbishy thing. There's lots of bands at Drisk."

Not without malice, for she was disappointed as well as annoyed, Mio retorted: "I don't believe you'd like the bands at Drisk, either. There'd be strange people at them, you know, and you always do look as cross as the cats if anybody speaks to you."

At this allusion, veiled though it was, to Gerald's insult, Carrie flamed into a rage. "Oh, yes, of course, with my hair in rats' tails. I suppose you think that because *your* hair grows in an ugly little frizz nobody else's is fit to be seen. They're not real curls, and you needn't imagine it. And it's as short as can be, like a big baby's, and never smooth. Besides, black hair always is *hijjis*; and everybody says so. As ugly as sin they think it is; that I can tell you, Miss Mio. And you may put up your good-for-nothing old fiddle yourself." She dropped her end of their load with a bang, and while she clumped noisily downstairs, Mio had to lug the violin-case, which she could not lift, unaided into its corner. She stood looking at it sadly for some time. It held a shattered hope.

CHAPTER VII

MEANWHILE, although speculations more or less fantastic about Vi Quin's gay doings at Drisk and their probable consequences were fairly rife at Craiganogue, authentic reports on the subject arrived there but meagrely, nor did they contain anything that would have satisfied people who looked for sensational developments. Vi herself was a bad correspondent, still hampered by mechanical difficulties in her letter-writing, laboriously producing an unformed, childish round-hand, which abounded in mis-spelling and blots. From her compositions little more could be gathered than that she was, in general, enjoying herself, and thought Drisk a jolly place. Lady Fenlow, too, wrote seldom, and for many weeks had nothing of any special interest to relate. Her letters were addressed to her daughter-in-law, Mabel Fenlow, who was then in England, and who transmitted to Craiganogue any passages that seemed both relevant and appropriate. For instance, she apprised her sister there that Lady Fenlow wrote: "Vi Quin seems to be having a good time, and getting on well. She is a nice little girl, not brilliant——" on reading which Vi's mother commented: "And who on earth *wants* a pretty young girl to be brilliant?" and privately considered the writer a stupid old woman—"but good-humoured

and easily pleased." She, however, suppressed the fact that Lady Fenlow had added: "To tell you the truth, she is rather stodgy, and I sometimes am half sorry that I did not bring Molly Gilmour here instead, who is a much livelier companion, though certainly a shocking little flirt."

It was not until late on in the summer, when Mrs. Fenlow was again visiting Craiganogue, that her letters from Drisk began to contain news which made her say: "*H'm-humm*," and hand them over to Mrs. Quin, with expressive glances, but no further remark, if other people were present. This news was supplemented by Vi's own communications, which about the same time became more detailed and self-centred. None of the facts stated could be regarded as singly of any considerable import; only in the aggregate did they grow significant. First, Lady Fenlow mentioned that they had asked to dinner a Mr. Hill-Clarke, who was a nephew of poor Captain Delaney's great friends, the Wrays, and had some land-agencies up in the North. He was spending his holidays at Drisk, and Captain Delaney had written to Sir Robert about him. On the evening that he dined, some people had failed them, so that she was obliged to send him in with Vi Quin, which she feared might have bored him, as some men don't appreciate school-girlish society for any length of time—the graceful term "*flapper*" had not yet enriched our language—however, they seemed quite to strike up a friendship.

Then Vi wrote of a Mr. Hill-Clarke, who sometimes came along with the young people's parties, when they went driving and boating. He was very good-natured. He had given her a rowing lesson. He said that she ought to wear gauntlet-gloves, and not spoil her wrists by getting them sunburnt. He used to row in boat-races long ago, before he was too old. Of course, he

could not now ; but he said he had not given up hunting yet. And it appeared from her next letter that he had in some measure shaken off his burden of age, for he was related to have said that Sweet Seventeen—"he meant me, you know"—must think him an old fogey—she spelled it with a superfluous "g." But she had said that, indeed, she did not think him any such thing. Of course, it would be quite absurd to. His hair was not a bit grey, and very little bald. Besides, nobody could see the top of his head, at least hardly ever, because he was so tall. Vi's epistolary style leaving it doubtful whether she had actually cited these arguments to Mr. Hill-Clarke, she passed on to another conversation, in the course of which he had said what a lucky man anybody would be that the Vi Queen, which sounded nearly the same as Vi Quin, took for her Vi-King. "I never can remember what a Vi-King is," she wrote, "but I suppose it must be a sort of Lord Liffennent."

Thereupon, a few posts later, Lady Fenlow sent more explicit tidings. "For some time past," she wrote, "I have seen that Mr. Hill-Clarke was taken with your niece Vi, and he has of late been paying her marked attentions. I kept my own counsel on the subject, as in such circumstances it's better to be anything than premature. However, he has now, I believe, practically proposed to her ; in fact, he has just been telling me about it, and I understand that he intends to do so more formally at Craiganogue. She is evidently highly delighted, poor child, and, indeed, as things go, she might easily do worse. He is fairly well off, and well connected, and well behaved, and though she may be thought rather young for him, the difference is on the *less wrong* side. I sincerely hope that it will all turn out happily, as I shall feel in some degree responsible."

In the same letter-bag came a note from Vi to her

mother, incoherently ecstatic, and it was very soon followed by the return of Vi herself, taking most of the household somewhat by surprise, and enveloped in a certain atmosphere of mystery. For two or three days this seemed to deepen, as far as her brethren were concerned, she being constantly carried off by her mother and Aunt Mabel to interminable talks from which the rest of the inquisitive world were rigorously excluded. A dull and discontented pause, so to speak, ensued in the schoolroom, where Miss Brannock, dull and discontented of mood, was now a more abiding presence than she had been for some time past, as Mrs. Quin, since her sister's coming, had shaken off all her invalid habits, with sudden energy, and no longer needed companionship or assistance in domestic affairs, ending a state of things which Miss Brannock would fain have fostered into a chronic one. Reluctantly she returned to her pupils, loth to the loth, and presided peevishly over a fractious, unsettled-feeling party.

But on the third morning, shortly after breakfast-time, during which a letter to Charlie Quin had been handed to and fro with suppressed excitement among the elders, the great disclosure was made. Vi's engagement was officially announced to the household. It produced a very strong sensation. Many rumours and conjectures, indeed, might have tended to make it seem a sort of open secret; yet all these shrank into a negligible filmy vagueness, which could scarcely blunt the clear impression of the marvellous fact that Vi was going to be married to one definite person of known name, who would arrive to-morrow by the three o'clock train from Athlone. As an immediate result there rose up round the schoolroom table, at which lessons were ostensibly in progress, a clack of voices loud enough to drown Miss Brannock's prompt proclamation of a holiday. Mio

played a little jig on the piano, and Gerald thumped an accompaniment to it with a ruler on the metal lid of the inkstand. But Carrie slipped in behind the hanging red table-cloth, and wept with remorse at the remembrance of her frequent crossnesses to Vi, who would be going away from them to live somewhere else for ever and ever. It was one among Carrie's unfortunate idiosyncrasies that her fits of compunction usually supervened at unsuitable times and seasons. Presently Vi's own appearance on the scene caused a brief hush of half awe-stricken constraint, at her first reception in the avowed character of such a being as a bride-elect; it was as if a formidably large-sized bird had suddenly alighted amid an assembly of twittering small finches. The twittering, however, was speedily resumed. Innumerable questions were to be asked and answered; things wonderful beyond all whooping to be told and heard.

Yes, Gilbert was coming to-morrow; he would send her a wire to say exactly when. It seemed ages since she had seen him, though it was really only last Thursday. Gilbert was his Christian name—Gilbert Evans—of course, they would all call him by his Christian name; he would certainly want them to. She thought it a very pretty one, Mrs. Gilbert Evans Hill-Clarke was what she would be. She liked the two names joined together; they looked quite uncommon, and lots of the best people had them that way. "Hill-Clarke" sounded very nice and would look well on their cards.

"Perhaps you will be as proud of yourself as a dog with two tails," Mio here suggested gravely, having yesterday heard the comparison made by Dinny Flynn the herd. It so took her Cousin Fred's fancy that he laughed loud and long, chuckling: "Right you are, Hyena; to be sure she will." And he repeated the saying at luncheon, rather to the annoyance of his

sister Vi, who was inclined to stand upon her new dignities, taking a solemn view of her position.

No, she couldn't show them her engagement ring to-day. Gilbert would bring it with him, she thought. It was to be a diamond hoop. He had given her the little brooch she had in her collar; she won it in a wager. And he would keep a hunter for her; he kept two himself, and there was lots of hunting about his place in the County Tyrone. "Mrs. Hill-Clarke, Mount Vale, Shankillen," would be her address. Gilbert was a J.P., and he could be Deputy High Sheriff any day, if he wanted to. How old was he? Indeed, now Gerald was too old to be rude enough to ask people's ages. But Gilbert was as young as anybody. Gerald vindicated his powers of rudeness by asserting and demanding: "That's all rot! Is he a baby brat like Mio?" only to be disregarded in favour of Miss Brannock's more agreeable remark that Mrs. Hill-Clarke would no doubt be quite the leading lady in her neighbourhood. Long were Vi's prospects discussed from this, and other equally flattering points of view.

The forecast made by her mother and her Aunt Mabel were naturally less highly rose-coloured; still, they might at this stage have been described as a good, strong, workaday pink. It was not to be imagined, of course, that all things were precisely what they would have chosen, if they had had the whole world from which to select. Mrs. Quin, for instance, wished that there had been not so much disparity between their ages; twenty years was a great gap. Mrs. Fenlow made lighter of it. Her mother-in-law said he was young for thirty-seven, certainly, and looked like a man who would wear well. And Vi was the sort of girl who would soon settle down to her housekeeping, and not care to racket about after the fashion of a very youthful couple. A mere boy

might not suit her so well. "You may depend upon it, too," Mrs. Fenlow continued, "she'll grow stout early, like all the Moriarty aunts. I shouldn't wonder if she were a good twelve stone by the time she's five-and-twenty; and everybody knows that there's nothing ages so quickly as fat. Gilbert Hill-Clarke, now, is of the long and lean swarthy-skinned type. I daresay he doesn't look a day older at present than he did when I saw him at Cork the last time I was over, six or seven years ago."

"What a child poor Vi was then!" Mrs. Quin suggested.

"And at what a rate she grew up," said Mrs. Fenlow, giving the insinuation a dexterous twist. "A more real drawback that occurs to me is the precariousness of such business as land-agencies these times. But he probably has means of his own; all those Clarkes were well-to-do, and I believe they came in for some property when they took on the Hill. Everybody says that his father had a fine place near Lisburn."

"Of course, it will be very pleasant to see her well established," said Mrs. Quin. "And she is evidently quite wrapped up in him. If he can make a satisfactory settlement on her, it really seems as if she might be very happy."

"It happens at a convenient time, too," said Mrs. Fenlow. "When Flossie needn't be on your mind for another two or three years, so that with Vi off your hands, you can concentrate your energies on getting Fred launched. It's high time to set about that, if he's still bent on the army."

"I must poke up Charlie about it," said her sister. "The rents come in so badly that it keeps us very short, he always declares. Then the wedding, and all that, will be some expense. I wonder whether there'll be

many of *his* relations to ask. Perhaps it will turn out a good opportunity for getting the house done up. It wants it badly, as, indeed, you see."

With an effort Mrs. Fenlow suppressed the candid opinion which was ever ready to clothe itself in speech, and she only said: "By and by your other girls will find it an advantage to have connections with a nice, presentable sort of establishment, where they can stay occasionally, and see something of a different world. Flossie, and Carrie, and Mio herself—I'm inclined to think I've done them all a good turn."

Clearly these two elders, albeit on the whole sanguine in their outlook, were not exposing themselves to disillusion by any means as recklessly as the girl and boy schoolroom party, listening and questioning and boasting and wondering and admiring, until an eavesdropper of a Fate might well have smiled with a prescient eye cocked sarcastically on realities to come, realities which the sub-title disillusion would accurately describe. One of them may be said to have arrived along with Gilbert Hill-Clarke. The good manners of the young Quins were, on his first appearance, put to a rather crucial test, which they stood creditably, inasmuch as not one of them failed to postpone until some suitable occasion his or her comments on their guest and brother-in-law to be. But when plain speaking was permissible, it showed that everybody had been surprised at his aged aspect. He was pronounced, without much exaggeration, to look about the same age as their father; who could not be called an old man, the senior of the children admitted, but who had nothing to do with youth. Vi herself had handicapped her Gilbert in his chances of producing a favourable first impression, by daringly describing him as "tall, dark and *awfully* handsome," which drew upon him eyes expectant at the outset, and then adversely

critical. A sense of disappointment was, in fact, generally felt, and not more than partially removed by Mr. Hill-Clarke's essays at making himself agreeable to his future connections. Only by degrees did he live down the reproach of comparative elderliness, and the disparaging opinion, which Miss Brannock and Flossie shared, that Sergeant O'Mahony at the Constabulary Barracks was much better-looking. Towards evening, however, a reaction in his favour did set in, not wholly apart from the fact that he had brought with him, and lavishly distributed, a large supply of extremely superior chocolate. Least successful were his ingratiating efforts in their effect on little Mio. She had taken one longish look at him on the occurrence of a convenient opportunity soon after his arrival, and had formed the opinion that she would not like him. This opinion she had, as was her wont, both kept, and kept to herself; that is to say, she never overtly expressed it, though something of the kind might have been inferred from a remark which she made a little later on. Talk at the schoolroom tea being still busy with the newest domestic events, touched among other matters on the acquisition of a brother-in-law. Carrie was disposed to see in it grounds for giving herself some consequential airs. She introduced into her discourse repeated mention of "Gilbert," airing her claims to speak thus familiarly of a stranger mature in years, and she bestowed on him a patronizing approval. "I think Gilbert meant to be very polite. At luncheon he said: 'May I trouble you to pass the mustard?' and afterwards he held the door open for me and Miss Brannock. And when he saw me coming into the drawing-room, he said to Vi: 'Is this my youngest sister-in-law?'"

"If he had said: 'Is this your fattest sister?' there would have been some sense in it," observed Gerald.

"I suppose being as rude as a pig is your idea of sense," Carrie replied with equally graceful wit; to which Gerald simply grimaced a rejoinder.

"Any fool can make faces, if that's all you can do," Carrie said, feeling that she had had the best of the encounter for once in a way. "And all I can say is that I think brothers-in-law are *ever* so much nicer than common brothers."

Thereupon her brother Fred, who sat over against her, having sought in the schoolroom a refuge from company, said with tragic gestures: "Bless us and save us! What's to become of the likes of us, then? I hope you don't think as badly of us, small Hyena," to his neighbour Mio, "or we'll be lost totally."

"Gilbert won't be *her* brother-in-law," Carrie said loftily. "He's not going to marry her sister, only her cousin."

"I don't want him for any kind of brother," Mio said. "I'd rather Mick Moynihan was, because then, maybe, he wouldn't ever go away with his fiddle."

"A common man like him!" Flossie protested, slightly scandalized.

"As common as dirt, I should say," added Gerald.

"You shouldn't be abusing poor people," Miss Brannock said, bethinking her of her duties as a preceptress; "they have their own feelings the same as ourselves." Her audience, however, had no leisure to bestow on high-flown moral sentiments.

"Vi says," Flossie resumed, with a reversion to her personal pomps and vanities, "that when she is married, I'll be *Miss* Quin, and not *Miss Florence* Quin, the way I am now. Of course, it won't make any difference to Carrie; only to me."

"Nothing ever does make any difference to me,"

said Carrie, "and it's the unfairest thing I ever heard of. But much you care."

"Oh, but when I'm married you'll be Miss Quin, Carrie," said Flossie soothingly. "I daresay I'll be long before you are grown-up and have cards. And, you know, it makes no difference to Mio either. She'll always be just Miss Helveran."

But Carrie, responding with a murmur about brats, remained immersed in gloom.

Such juvenile fatuities might, indeed, be considered neither here nor there; yet they were to some extent miniature travesties of disappointments and disaffections occurring on a larger scale. A minor instance of these befell Vi in connection with her engagement ring. Gilbert Hill-Clarke had brought a few for her to choose from, and the brilliants, which she most desired, were in a setting too tight for her finger. The best fit was a half-hoop of pearls with diamond sparks, which Gilbert strongly recommended, and which she finally let herself be persuaded into selecting against her will. Thereby she abandoned a dearly-cherished wish to have a ring flashing with every movement like one of Lady Fenlow's, a much admired object; and she did not agree with him that pearls were more becoming than diamonds; on the contrary, she thought that to a person whose hands were rather red pearls were rather trying. When she exhibited it to her mother, so obvious was her discontent, that Mrs. Quin brought forward hastily everything that could be improvised in praise of pearls. That they were more suitable than diamonds for a very young girl was her concluding argument, which failed to convince. Vi alleged with incontrovertible truth that she would not be a young girl all her life, and turned away, still looking disconsolate. As ill-luck would have it, she loitered near an open door, while Mrs. Fenlow, supposing her out of

hearing, advanced from a writing-table in the background and said: "Well now, Ethel, if I had been there, I would not have let him beguile her into taking that instead of the diamonds. Of course, it's not half the price. Rather a shabby proceeding on his part, I think."

"One really doesn't quite know yet how much he can afford to spend on things of the kind," said Mrs. Quin, diffidently standing up for the accused, whom she had begun to regard as a member of her family.

"Diamonds are always a safe investment, I believe," said Mrs. Fenlow. "Whereas pearls get discoloured, and are otherwise perishable. The other would have been a better bargain, very likely, besides pleasing the poor child."

This little colloquy, as might have been expected, put Vi more out of conceit with her ring than ever. She could hardly bring herself to show it off with a good grace as repeatedly as she was called upon to do, and she took little pleasure in the admiring ejaculations which it evoked. Yet less than six months before, an announcement that she would so soon possess a glistening rime-white ring, with all the privileges and dignities which it symbolized, would have almost scared her, like the half-incredible prophecy of a splendid fairy-godmother. Thus high had her pride climbed with her fortunes.

If she had known how matters actually stood, she would have seen that it was about this time gravely threatened with a fall. The truth was that disappointments and disillusion were developing themselves in quarters far more influential than the schoolroom or even the drawing-room. They did by and by come to a serious crisis at an interview which her Gilbert had with her father in his business-room; but before that point

was reached they had grown rife and importunate in the minds of each.

Quite unintentionally Vi had herself been helping to prepare a disconcerting surprise for Mr. Hill-Clarke on his arrival at Craiganogue. A propensity, innocent enough, for making the best, in conversation, of herself and her belongings, had caused her talk about home to be a misleading source of information for a stranger who listened at the safe distance of Drisk. Designing nothing more deceptive than a little harmless bragging, she diffused a general atmosphere of exaggeration over every subject that she mentioned, not so much by any direct mis-statement of facts as by a magnifying misuse of terms. Everything that she touched on was enlarged and exalted. The Craiganogue stables, for instance, were a frequent theme. Her father's hunters—Merlin was *her* favourite—the Loughbracken foxhounds, the Findrum harriers; the meets to which they drove, and followed across country—but she always hunted herself whenever she could possibly manage it; only, of course, there were the boys to mount. She omitted the fact that her first run had so far been her last, ending abruptly within a few potato drills of the high-road whence it had started on Iceland pony-back. It would be great fun, she thought, if her father were M.F.H., and she hoped he would soon take the hounds. Shooting and salmon-fishing were customary pursuits; her father had a cocker spaniel for whose mother its owner had refused two hundred pounds. Grooms, stable helpers, gardeners and herds were alluded to airily; also conservatories and vineries. By a flight of imagination which half amazed herself, she transfigured old Andy Byrne, who did odd repairing jobs, into the estate carpenter, and introduced him in that capacity as re-flooring the private chapel. The house was *hundreds* of years old, and the room

opening out of the back-hall must have been a private chapel or oratory. Everybody said that all the Quins used to be Roman Catholics in the old times. And so forth with much detail.

From all this Mr. Hill-Clarke gathered a general impression of an ancient county family, living in some state on their ancestral demesne. Not perhaps more wealthy than ancient Irish families are nowadays wont to be, but likely to provide the eldest daughter of the house with at the very least a decent portion. He was not sordidly fortune-hunting; still, he was far from desiring, and could not well afford, a penniless bride. Therefore, it gratified him to perceive what he deemed indications that such a one need not be apprehended in Vi Quin. Again, he was disposed to regard a good connection as scarcely less desirable than money; and that he would certainly secure by an alliance with the Quins of Craiganogue. His Hill grandfather had been a tradesman doing a small business in Belfast. His wishes in the matter perhaps led him to interpret signs with more alacrity and confidence than he would have done in a dispassionate mood; but be that as it may, his faith in them was irretrievably shaken almost before the car drew up at Craiganogue hall-door. Considerable professional experience of inspecting house property enabled him to form a judgment quickly and accurately; he recognized at a glance the architectural type before him. It was a bad specimen of a bad class. Unmistakably its ill-designed structure dated from early Victorian days. Feeble pretentiousness was written on its dirt-coloured, patchy front, which needed not only paint but plaster, and not plaster only but bricks and mortar. Even without the use of his eyes the atmosphere which met him on the threshold with odours compounded of stale turf-smoke, cooking and mildew, would have

apprised him of a meanly proportioned edifice, undermined by an unwholesome cavernous basement, filling it perpetually with kitchen clatter, and with a mouldy damp rising up to meet what percolated through the leaky roof. Vi's hundreds and hundreds of years melted away into two or three generations of disrepair, and so many other things vanished therewith that he foresaw clearly enough what he would find when he was conducted round the premises by Jack and Fred. It seemed all like a caricature of poor Vi's grandiloquent reports. The dilapidated stables sheltered an old grey, hoary and decrepit, and a shaggy-hoofed brown cob with a coarse, large-eared head. In the weedy garden the green-houses looked as if they had been battered by an antediluvian hail-shower, and the crumbling mock-antiques in the pleasure-grounds had an air of forlorn vulgarity. If the glories of the place could not be said to have utterly departed, it was simply because they had never existed. Assuredly the Quins were not entitled to carol : " Oh, once we were elegant people ! "

To Mr. Hill-Clarke these disillusioning discoveries brought all the more chagrin and foreboding by reason of his host's demeanour. The master of Craiganogue was quite obviously anxious to avoid a discussion of business matters with his candidate son-in-law. Any conversation that took a turn likely to bring one on was either broken off or deflected into some different channel, often with betraying clumsiness. Other opportunities were, in like manner, withheld or shunned. Once Mr. Hill-Clarke found himself positively hustled off with the boys to some rabbit-shooting, which he recorded in his diary as most absolute rubbish, just when he had proposed that he should join Mr. Quin in a walk to the post-office ; and incidents of the same tendency occurred too repeatedly to be explained away by chance. His

own explanation was that Vi's father could or would give little or nothing along with her, and disliked the prospect of saying so. Furthermore, that he possibly wished to let the engagement grow firmlier rooted before he jeopardized its existence. No doubt the safe bestowal of a daughter was an object to him, and he would be loth to see the whole thing "go off on the settlements," a risk which he must recognize. In his own mind Mr. Hill-Clarke had almost resolved against letting it come to that. He was really fond of Vi. But he fully intended to adopt a firm tone, to make himself, should it seem expedient, extremely disagreeable, and to take jolly good care that they were not done out of her share of anything that might be forthcoming either now or eventually. Three or four days going by without change in the state of affairs led him to believe that the worst might be expected, and he could not quite conceal his dissatisfaction.

Meanwhile his conjectures about the causes of the delay were partially right. Charlie Quin was seeking to postpone the bad quarter of an hour when, as far as he could see, he would be obliged to make a mortifying admission, nothing less so that his daughter must go empty-handed to her husband's door. How that circumstance would probably affect his future son-in-law's plans he had not thought of considering—there Mr. Hill-Clarke was at fault—for the aspect from his own point of view entirely occupied his mind. It harassed and aggrieved him. At first he had been distinctly pleased by the tidings that Vi "had gone and set up a young man, the little minx!" The proceeding struck him as absurd, hardly to be taken seriously, yet advantageous rather than otherwise, on the whole. Of course, he wouldn't like the girls to end as a trio of old maids, and a vision of his wife's Moriarty aunts crossed

his mind. It also occurred to him that, of course, Vi must be given some sort of marriage portion. But the thought did not just then weigh heavily upon him. He had in imagination pictured her suitor as a pleasant young fellow, not so much older than herself, with whom a suitable arrangement could no doubt easily be made, especially as he was said to have ample means of his own. A hundred or two down, with more to accrue should rents come in better, or the estate be sold, would probably meet the wishes of the youthful pair. Not his own, it is true. Charlie Quin was by no means satisfied that his eldest daughter should have such a meagre dowry; it accorded not at all with his sense of the fitness of things, a sense on which, however, he frequently found himself unable to act. He had, in reality, more family pride and longer family traditions than he was credited with by Mr. Hill-Clarke, whose opinion, well grounded as far as he based it on what he saw at Craiganogue, necessarily left out of account many things unseen. No man would have liked better than Charlie Quin to be liberal, even lordly, on such an occasion, putting it out of the other high contracting party's power to consider that an alliance with the Quins had proved financially a bad bargain. But he clearly recognized the impossibility of doing as he liked in the matter.

Not, however, until he had actually witnessed Mr. Hill-Clarke's arrival, did he begin to feel heavily oppressed by the embarrassments of the situation. Although he had more than once heard him mentioned as a person of mature years, he had continued to see with his mind's eye the mere youth of his preconceptions, three or four-and-twenty, say, at most. Hence the driving up to the door of a man apparently little younger than himself came as a disconcerting shock. One of its first effects on him was the springing up of an

instinctive conviction that he would now find more unpleasant by far the task of explaining how very little money he had. For that was what it would amount to. Hence, again, followed his endeavours to put off the uninviting interview, partly from sheer repugnance, and partly from a notion that during the delay some expedient might suggest itself to him. But the longer he meditated the more palpable his resourcelessness grew. Those few sunshiny August days passed dismally for him, mainly in aimless wanderings round his ill-kept grounds and ill-stocked fields, with the idle wishes, that may be otherwise called regrets, as the burden of his thoughts. He wished that he had taken up some profession in his youth, or that he had set himself steadily to make something of the bit of land when he succeeded to it on his father's death. In either case his position might now have been more satisfactory. Looking back on his life, he seemed to himself to have spent it in lounging about the place, without the means of doing anything more amusing, or the energy to employ himself on anything more useful. So here he was, too old for fresh starts at forty odd, with Jack growing up to follow in his futile footsteps, and the other two boys to dispose of, goodness knows how.

But Vi had for the present become the immediate and engrossing object of his anxieties. She was his eldest child, and he retained a vivid remembrance of his absurd pride in that first possession, a pride which had never wholly passed away, and which had now been revived by her sudden call to play the ever-romantic part of a maiden sought in marriage. In more auspicious circumstances the event would have gratified and elated him ; as things were, an intractable difficulty turned the edge of all his pleasure. He fretted and feared under his encumbering burden of an empty purse. What if this

candidate son-in-law cooled off, drew back, backed out of it altogether, on discovering that he had wooed a bride who could bring neither goods nor gear? What if sorrow and disappointment and mortification should thus come on poor little Vi? She used to think no end of her daddy when she was small, but it would be folly to suppose that any such thing would content her once she had set her heart on somebody else. With angry dread her father contemplated these possibilities, which were strengthened into probabilities by his growing sense of how very penniless she would be. There was, indeed, nothing for her at all. Not a farthing secured to her under marriage settlements; never a legacy left to her by convenient god-parent or favourite-making aunt. For the somewhat exceptionally low ebb of his own finances he felt himself partly to blame. Earlier in the year he had backed a horse and an hotel company—but *that* was called investing—with disastrous results, which, added to loss of rents, kept him uncommonly tight. The most he could do, without resort to a ruinous borrowing, would be to raise a couple of hundred pounds. He could not lay his hand on another halfpenny—except, of course, that money of Mio's.

The first time that Charlie Quin made this exception, he turned away from it casually, letting it pass as a thing neither here nor there. It could not be taken into account in his consideration of ways and means, and was accordingly a negligible quantity, from that point of view. Yet somehow he was continually coming back to it, as to a full stop at the end of his unsuccessful investigations: nothing except that money of Mio's. By and by he slightly altered the phrase: Of course there was that money of Mio's. And then he began to think about it more particularly. Five thousand pounds were invested for her on trust. Nothing had been added

to that sum on account of savings out of income ; he supposed there were no savings, but on that point he did not dwell. As sole trustee, he could at any time realize the securities for purposes of re-investment or so forth ; no doubt better investments might be found even in trustees' stocks. Supposing now he did happen to sell out part of it, and supposing this fellow Hill-Clarke should make difficulties about a settlement, would there be any great objection to taking a short loan of perhaps a thousand or so ? He would pay interest on it, of course, double interest, for that matter, and it would be perfectly safe. Had he not himself advanced a thousand to the Bernard Quins when they went out to the Argentine ? Now that they were getting on well, they could quite easily refund it, if the worst came to the worst ; but the chances were that the two big farms at Clonfarren would be sold by the Land Commissioners long before there was any need to bother about the principal.

To this conclusion he came more or less definitely one afternoon, slouching up and down the path under the growing shade of the north wall in the kitchen-garden. He would not do it unless something happened, he thought, that seemed likely otherwise to smash up poor little Vi's prospects of happiness. Unless, in plainer English, Hill-Clarke stuck out for a more substantial dowry than could, save by that expedient, be raised ; unless also it was evident that Vi would be very seriously afflicted if the match fell through. As far as he could judge, she was very much in love, and he had no reason to suppose that she would lightly cease to be so. But he would watch her closely for a few days more, and find out the opinions of some other lookers-on. Charlie Quin was disposed to believe in long attachments, and to disapprove of long engagements. His sister Mina's patient;

anxious wait through a decade of waning youth, with its tragically scant reward, was a vivid memory; and not less strong was an apprehension that his daughter's fate might be still more melancholy, if the best years of her life were blighted by a love affair which ended in worse than nothing at all. Such a risk as that he certainly would not run for the sake of merely a little legal punctiliousness. He was pleased with this way of putting it.

Meditating thus, he began to saunter towards the house, moved by a sense that tea-time must be at hand, and round the corner of a walk screened by tall black-currant bushes he came upon Vi and Gilbert Hill-Clarke. Their backs were turned to him, as they stood by a gooseberry bush, which a network of bindweed had made into a miniature wigwam. "Your gooseberries want pruning awfully," Hill-Clarke was saying. "These hairy greens aren't half the size that they ought to be. All the long, straggling twigs should be clipped, and some branches lopped off altogether—this and this, for instance." He pointed out one or two, unwinding the coiled tendrils which had clasped them spirally.

"I do declare, Gilbert," Vi said, looking up at him admiringly, "I believe you know all about everything." She made this avowal of an idiotic faith with an air of rapturous earnestness which could not fail to inspire confidence in her sincerity.

"Well, at any rate, I know the silliest little girl in Connaught when I see her, my Vi-Queen," he said caressingly, and half turning round, took both her hands in his, when he caught sight of Charlie Quin. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, "here's your father."

"Oh, Daddy dear," she said, running up to him, "we came out to look for you, only we got caught on the gooseberries, you know. This horrid, horrid person wanted to tell you that he has just got a detestable

letter, which he says must take him away early to-morrow."

So her father knew that explanations could be put off no longer.

They took place during the interval between tea and dinner. Mr. Hill-Clarke began by making with clearness and frankness a statement about his financial affairs. His income was fairly good—seven or eight hundred a year; but a comparatively small proportion of it only came from property, and the professional part of it might be subject to shrinkage as time, and land purchase, went on. He had some prospect, too remote, however, to count upon, as more than one good life intervened, of succeeding to a small estate owned by cousins in the south of Ireland. Life insurance seemed to him the best means of making a settlement on his wife, and as he was not as young as he could wish—a common complaint—he would have to pay a high premium. Then his house, a bachelor's establishment, would require some doing up and general improving to put it in such order as he would like it to be before its mistress arrived. A few hundreds which he had in the bank would come in handily for this purpose, though, of course, he could not prudently leave himself without some balance to his credit.

Here he paused significantly, awaiting, it was plain, a reciprocal declaration.

"Upon my word, Hill-Clarke," his *vis-à-vis* at the writing-table said, with a vehemence which was partly quite spontaneous, "I wish to God that I could say I stood as well with the world as you, or anything like it."

He saw the other's countenance fall, and still watching it eye-corneredly repeated with emphasis: "Or anything like it."

In answer, all that Mr. Hill-Clarke said at first was : " Indeed ? " Then, silence continuing, he added : " Times, no doubt, have been bad of late for land-owners ; still——"

" Bad ! " Charlie Quin broke out again, and again not wholly counterfeiting the strength of his sentiments. " They're ruin pure and simple. Why, there's many a little tenant-farmer with a dozen beasts on his bit of land, and the money he owes for rent in the savings-bank, who's got better reasons to hope that his wife and children won't end their days in the nearest work-house than I have at the present minute."

For a moment Mr. Hill-Clarke stared at him blankly. " Oh, but you know, Mr. Quin," he said then with a slight tinge of jocularly, " you can hardly expect me seriously to believe that things are as bad as all that comes to ! "

" I don't know what you call serious," Mr. Quin said inconsequently, " but I'm often at my wit's end to imagine where I'm to turn next ; and that's serious enough, I should say, in all conscience, when it's a question of starving a wife and half a dozen children."

" If so," Mr. Hill-Clarke began, and stopped. " In that case," he began again, " I fear that I shall be obliged to modify my plans—or perhaps to—to abandon them altogether. For your daughter's own sake, I could not, especially in view of our respective ages, venture upon matrimony without providing for her more adequately than may be possible if I have to depend, as you seem to imply, completely on my own resources. I must, in fact, reconsider the whole subject." Even as he spoke he was recapitulating in an undercurrent of thought various points upon which he had already decided, in case the worst came to the worst, as it had now apparently done. For though he believed the poverty pleaded

to be much exaggerated, he viewed the plea as virtually a point-blank refusal of any marriage portion. He would not break off the match, but he would delay, and seem to deliberate, and eventually make a compliment of letting it go on. He would have a most quiet wedding, with no bridesmaids to accept the gifts of the bridegroom, nor other annoying expenses. He would take out a smaller life-insurance policy, and not take in that corner of the lawn for a rose-garden. All these were only minor economies, yet in the aggregate they might go a long way to make good the missing "fortune," unless it was to have run to four figures at least, with further expectations. Thus Mr. Hill-Clarke.

But Charlie Quin, by whom words were heard, and from whom thoughts were hidden, also deemed that the worst had come to the worst. Every syllable that Mr. Hill-Clarke uttered seemed a menace to Vi's happiness and well-being. "I must reconsider the whole subject," sounded to her father like the culminating threat. With a feeling of positive relief he grasped at the means of warding it off from her which he had resolved in such dangerous straits to use.

"Well, Hill-Clarke, all I can say is," he said in a casual sort of tone, "that I'm sorry I can do so little to assist you in your considerations. But every penny I could manage now would be a thousand down; over and above anything forthcoming in the future." His keen eye watching effects saw such a rapid clearing up of countenance at the word "thousand," that he wished he had mentioned half the amount. Mr. Hill-Clarke was, indeed, surprised very pleasantly. That Mr. Quin should at one moment bitterly predict pauperism for himself and his family, and at the next talk lightly of a thousand pounds as a peasant match-maker might in the course of negotiations throw in an old kettle or

a three-legged stool, seemed rather perplexing; but, then, his future father-in-law undoubtedly was a queer, unsociable, moody kind of person, likely to say the first pessimistic thing that came into his head. After briefly debating what tone he should take, he judged it expedient to assume a homely, hearty manner, and he said: "Well now, Mr. Quin, it's you that's the lucky man, if you can afford to think little or nothing of a thousand pounds with more to follow. Why, that would make it far and away easier to settle matters comfortably for Vi, which is, of course, what we both are concerned about."

"To be sure," assented Charlie Quin. Clearly all danger of a rupture, if ever existent, had ceased to be. So secure did he feel, that he worked off a touch of spleen by adding, with an echo of Mr. Hill-Clarke's bluntness: "I won't deny that I could have wished she had taken a fancy to someone nearer her own age. But I daresay there are plenty of worse jobs than the situation of old man's darling."

A few days later Mr. Quin's stockbrokers' clerk made a mistake, the result of which was the selling out of the whole of Mr. Quin's Canadian Pacific Railway Stock, instead of the half for which he had given instructions. The blunder did not appear to him a matter of much importance. He could, of course, at once reinvest the superfluous thousand. Anyhow, it would be perfectly safe. *It was not likely* that he would let anything happen to the detriment of poor Mina's child, poor little imp, left to be nobody's first object. Sometimes he wished that she had gone to Mrs. Armitage, though on the present occasion it would have been awkward for him. To consider contingencies rather than facts was always a habit of his. What had actually happened, likelihoods apart, certainly had not improved Mio's position. If

Mrs. Fenlow had been, as she was not, aware of the transaction, she would have entertained strong misgivings as to whether by promoting the Hill-Clarke-Quin alliance she had ever so indirectly benefited the Quins' little ward.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE time of Vi's engagement was a lively one at Craiganogue. Every day almost brought something new and thrilling, more often than not, though by no means invariably, in an agreeable way. Gilbert Hill-Clarke came and went, fairly popular, on the whole, the household's sentiments towards him ranging from Vi's undissembled adoration to Mio's unexpressed dislike. Wedding presents came also, and remained, not really in any prodigious profusion, yet numerous enough to give the young Quins the sense that Vi was enjoying a perpetual and glorified birthday. A special interest was lent thereby to the arrival of old Larry Magill, the letter-carrier, who conveyed many of them, and found in them a source of much jocularly. It pleased him to assume that every parcel contained a gift from "Miss Vi's bachelor," and he expressed this belief whenever he handed one to her, generally adding conjectures about the nature of its contents. "Faix, now, Miss Vi, according to the feel of that I would say 'twas some silky, smoothy ribbons he's after sending you for to be making yourself a few tasty streamers the same as I see streeling out of the ladies' hats;" or, "Just try the weight of that little box, Miss Vi. Unless there does be gold in it, I dunno how it got that much heavi-

ness inside the small size of it. And it registered, too. You may depend, Miss Vi, himself has been spending money on you this time in double handfuls, so to speak. 'Tis a grand brooch with stones in it, I wouldn't wonder." But if there happened to be nothing for her, Larry drew the gloomiest inference. "Ne'er a halfpenny stampworth for you, Miss Vi, this morning. Not so much as a post-card with a picture of a couple of hearts on a skewer, or a verse of poetry at the back. Forgotten you he has, Miss Vi, and take care he isn't thinking of some other young lass that he's posting presents off to instead. Not but what he'd be hard set to pick up one that he would use the same pen for writing the name of, if he knew what he was about."

Looking on from her seat on one of the hall-door steps, Mio was rather scandalized because at this Vi would giggle and toss her head, and say that whoever got the present would be quite welcome to it. In Mio's private opinion Vi should have somehow politely given Larry to understand that these matters were no affair of his, or perhaps better still, have let somebody else receive the letters. In those days Mio was not uncommonly a silent critic of her elders, who were everybody.

Then the incidents of Vi's trousseau began to interest engrossingly all the womankind who were in any degree concerned, and the more so that the head of the household was providing funds with un hoped-for liberality. Mrs. Fenlow took the bride-elect for a fortnight's shopping orgie to Dublin, whence they returned accompanied and followed by lofty piles of those cardboard boxes which, opened, disclosed foldures of tissue-paper, snowily crisp, as neat almost as the calyx of a bud unblown. Once it happened that these very careful wrappings came near causing disaster to the finery they were meant to shield. Some sudden diversion to other affairs had left

a capacious glazy-white box half unpacked on the sofa in the schoolroom, which was occupied only by Mio and her Cousin Gerald. As she peered between the thin ruffled sheets at gleams of pale-pink satin, something in the texture and rustling sound suggested to her a comparison.

"If this paper," she said, "was cut up into little bits, and had pictures and words on them, they would be just like the bank-notes Uncle Charlie gave Aunt Ethel this morning at breakfast. He put a gold sixpence on top of them, and said they were ten-pound-ten."

Gerald came over to look. "Golly!" he said. "That one piece would make dozens of notes, if we could fix them up. It is just the same sort of stuff."

"You couldn't," said Mio. "You wouldn't know how to draw the women with fuzzy wreaths on their heads, emptying things out of their bags."

"Oh, there are different patterns; some of them are quite plain," said Gerald. "I declare I'll cut off a bit and try. Rot! What harm could it do? There's twice as much as anybody wants." With Miss Brannock's scissors he did cut off an oblong piece, on which he proceeded to write, using the slanted box-lid as a perilous desk for the large glass ink-bottle. But before he had well begun his crude forgery, the door opened with a jerk, causing vibrations which started a slide so swift, that he was not in time to check its slithery descent. For an awful moment it looked as if the bottle must empty itself sheerly into the box; however, this catastrophe was escaped, though the crash down on the floor bespattered the immaculate outside with black drops, testifying to the imminence of the danger incurred. Miss Brannock it was who had come in, and who, after a shriek, worthy of any housemaid on encountering a rat

as big as a calf, averred that she had been "frightened out of a year's growth." Extremely alarmed and irate though she was, she could not make any great fuss about her pupil's misdemeanour, because she felt herself to be in some measure implicated, inasmuch as, strictly speaking, she should have remained on duty, instead of running out with the rest to see whether Naylor's ass-cart had brought an expected hamper from Dublin. She busied herself, therefore, in hasty attempts to obliterate the accident's traces with salts of lemon, and was so far successful that the blots on the box had been reduced to scarcely noticeable smudges before its unsuspecting owner returned. Vi, in a hurry to set off for a walk with her Gilbert, fastened it up without further unpacking, and was grateful for Miss Brannock's offer to carry it upstairs. Having deposited it safely in the little porch-room, she again reverted to the scare she had had. "I'd have given me life for a day's purchase when I saw the thing settling to slither down," she said to herself. "Such a place to cock it in! But there's no harm done, and all's well that ends well. My, but they're giving her a grand turn-out. All the same, if I was in her coat, I wouldn't say I'd not have thought twice before I took a man nearly old enough to be me father." Then, descending the stairs: "I must fetch Lizzie Hanlon to it with a wet cloth. It's lucky that ink's cheap; and the school-room carpet couldn't be any worse if they spilt quarts over it."

A vexatious mishap thus came within a hair's-breadth of materializing, and recoiled into nothingness. But it is not to be supposed that two or three months could pass anywhere without things ever and anon going crookedly, and not merely threatening to do so. At Craiganogue, one morning, they seemed from the outset to take a contrary turn, beginning before breakfast, with the clatter

of a thunderous hail-shower, which was bad for the ripe corn, ready to be reaped, and for Mrs. Quin's Milanese hen, sitting on a clutch of prize eggs ; and for the temper of more than one member of the household, whose nerves were set on edge by electrical disturbances. These conditions were productive of moods which civilly invited, if they did not actually run open-armed to meet and greet all approaching grievances ; and breakfast was marked by some symptoms of a morose and querulous spirit. Those who were in a position to express discontent with their food did express it trenchantly ; while others found various appropriate subjects for unfavourable criticism. Soon afterwards old Larry Magill, splashing through puddles to the porch, brought disappointing mails. There were some bills ; there were no presents ; there was at least one annoying letter. Discouraged by the irresponsive demeanour of Mr. Hill-Clarke, Larry's little pleasantries fell flat, and he left increased depression behind him.

The annoying letter was for Gilbert Hill-Clarke from his elder and only sister, a spinster, who lived, as a rule, in Italy with an invalid aunt, but who now, as ill-luck would have it, had come over on a visit to the County Tyrone. She wished for an invitation to her brother's wedding, and not only so, but would, it was evident, be deeply affronted if she were not asked to act as bridesmaid. When Gilbert told Vi of this, such was her astonishment and dismay that she unguardedly exclaimed : " A bridesmaid ! But, my goodness, Gilbert, she must be as old as the hills. She'd look quite ridiculous. Why, she's older than you, you said ; she can't be less than forty."

He was rather shocked and disgusted, being too nearly his sister's contemporary to hear her set down as hopelessly antiquated without a pang. However, he sup-

pressed his feelings from policy as well as in consideration of Vi's very youthful years, and entered a protest good-humouredly. "Of course, I know that Hariette's not exactly in her first youth," he said, "and, for that matter, neither am I. Still, forty's not such an extraordinarily old age as you seem to think, Miss Vi. You mustn't take it for granted that a woman's entirely shelved because she's over the venerable age of seventeen."

"Oh, but *she's* nothing like seventeen at all," Vi persisted, unyieldingly matter-of-fact. "It would be absurd. Do you think she *really* wants to be? We've nearly settled that they're to wear white and forget-me-not blue. I say, couldn't you tell her that the bridesmaids are all to be children? Flossie's not sixteen, you know. I daresay she wouldn't mind then; but, anyhow, *anything* would be better than spoiling the effect of it all." This was a polite version of the thought in her mind, which ran: "What matter if the silly old woman is offended? It's her own fault for being such an idiot."

To her annoyance Gilbert did not approve of her suggestion, but said more stiffly: "I can't agree with you. I shouldn't like to run the risk of hurting her feelings on account of a mere trifle. It's always advisable to keep on good terms with near relations, especially when you have so few of them as I." This general proposition was particularly recommended to him by a fear lest a quarrel with Hariette might lead her to influence their aunt against bequeathing to him a half-promised set of Chipendale chairs, which he had long been coveting. But as Vi, who was sitting in the hall-window, swung her dangling feet impatiently, and maintained a pouting silence, he mingled cajolery with his arguments: "You see, little Vi, poor Hariette's my only sister, and it

doesn't seem so very long since she was a slip of a girl like yourself. But I'm afraid the fact is, my Vi-Queen, that you are marrying a regular old fogey . . ."

So then it was her turn to protest and disclaim, with much sincerity as far as concerned his pathetic admission of over-advanced years; and no further animadversions on those of his sister appeared possible, at least addressed to him.

It was different when she carried the news to her mother and Aunt Mabel, bursting in on them with it as they sat working in the breakfast-room; for as a consequence of her social promotion her affairs had become, as a rule, more important than to be adequately discussed in mere schoolroom conclaves. She now spoke with vehement bitterness of this misfortune, going so far as to allege that she would rather have no bridesmaids at all than have them made a show of by being mixed up with detestable old hags. Her mother, in some dismay, tried to soothe and exhort, urging the impossibility of not being civil to Gilbert's people, and pointing out how natural it was that poor Miss Hill-Clarke should wish to be present at her brother's wedding. But Vi only added implacably: "And make a laughing-stock of us." Mrs. Fenlow more successfully adopted another line of argument. "Really, Vi, I don't think you need make yourself unhappy about anything of that kind," she said. "You'll find most likely that she is quite presentable. If she takes after her brother, it is a good type of looks for wearing. But in any case, with that big hat, and a little making-up, the chances are that she'll be nothing worse than just a sort of foil to your own and Flossie's freshness."

This view of the matter quite took Vi's fancy. It had not occurred to her to think of old Miss Hill-Clarke in such a capacity as a foil, which sounded rather

romantic, and the idea much mollified her feelings towards her future sister-in-law. "Well, maybe so," she said with a clearing countenance.

But the day was to be a day of misfortune, and in accordance with its destiny, Vi now proposed to her aunt a plan which she had much at heart. She was bent on having a page, or a pair of pages, at her wedding, which, in her opinion, could not otherwise be considered smart; and the only eligible small boys among their acquaintances were her Aunt Mabel's two sons, at school near London. Their coming might easily be arranged, as their mother, who would, of course, attend the wedding, could bring them with her. Nothing seemed simpler. Nevertheless, Mrs. Fenlow immediately and utterly refused her consent. At the first glance, so many objections rose up before her that she did not hesitate for a moment. Interruption of studies, certain expense of journeys, possible expense of costumes, much unprofitable trouble—there was no need to consider such a scheme. On second thoughts she did but soften down the prompt and peremptory terms of her refusal by adding some details to show that what had been asked for was not worth the having. "You see, my dear," she said, "besides their being so busy, both of them with school exams. coming on, Ned is really too big for that sort of thing; and as for Bobkins, I must candidly admit that he never *was* a pretty child, and at present he has lost all his front teeth, which makes him quite an object. A page is nothing if not pretty, and rather a mistake, I think, at best. There's no sense in dressing up little boys; they naturally hate it, unless they're silly and conceited, and nobody wants them to cultivate a taste for fine clothes. Little girls, now, are different. If I were you, I wouldn't mind about pages, but concentrate myself on the bridesmaids. What would you

think of their carrying large *bags* of silk and muslin, to match their dresses, filled with flowers to scatter before you coming out? I saw them at the Peter Hunts' daughter's wedding last month, and thought the effect quaint and 'off the common.' "

But Vi would not be diverted from her pages, and withdrew in a perturbed frame of mind. By this time mid-October had been fixed for the wedding, so that here on the threshold of September arrangements of the kind were becoming urgent matters, and the dangerous delay caused her to fuss and fume. At luncheon her temper was further ruffled by the behaviour of her brethren, whom the tedium of a vacant morning weather-bound indoors had goaded into spasms of inane hilarity. Some time since they had hit on the brilliant witticism of converting the name Hill-Clarke into "Ill-Clerk," thence ingeniously developed into "the Interesting Invalid." As Vi had perceived that her Gilbert did not appreciate jests in which his solemnly-taken self was concerned, and as this one had not yet reached his ears, she anxiously wished it not to do so; but the giggling and whispering round the table kept her on thorns all through the meal, and at last, when Fred had gravely asked his opinion as to the wholesomeness of gooseberry fool for an interesting invalid, receiving the oracular response that it depended on circumstances, she could endure the situation no longer. Jumping up abruptly, she announced that if Gilbert and she were going over to the Lees', they had better set off before the rain began again. A roof of slate-coloured cloud, with misty amber gleams about its eaves, betokened that this might soon happen, and Gilbert, looking out unenthusiastically on the damp grass-border, suggested a postponement of the expedition until the weather promised drier things. Vi would not consent. She had long been looking forward to

the visit, already put off so often by chance occurrences, that she had begun to think there was a fate against it, so she said. Now she had made up her mind to accomplish it, notwithstanding any unpropitiousness of the moment. In the approval and admiration of old Mrs. Lee, the nursery ruler, wont to predict high fortune for her favourite, Vi sunned herself with a pleasure which had some glamour of childhood about it. Nowhere else did she feel so much surrounded by the atmosphere of a fairy-tale dream come true; yet nowhere else was she so little elevated and self-important. A postscript to the letter announcing her engagement had contained the injunction: *Don't let anybody tell Nannie Lee till I come back*, but of the triumphant news-bearing which it had been written to secure for herself she was deprived by the forestalling swiftness of gossip. Still, there remained to her the glory of personally bringing her fiancé for exhibition at Mallymaquilty Farm, and having resolved to escort him thither that afternoon, her persistence carried her point.

Not, indeed, to success; the afternoon was in the main a failure. It began unenjoyably with the walk through wet fields, where, skirting hedges, long grass was cold and dank, and, crossing open spaces, the air, chilled by hail-showers, had the shrewd nip of March added to the dull heaviness of autumn. At the farm, however, warmth and dryness, with a most hospitable and delighted welcome, might with much confidence be counted on. And so they might have been had not a stopped drain in the course of the morning's downpour flooded the Lees' ground-floor with muddy waters, the traces of which they found the dowager Mrs. Lee toiling to remove single-handed, as her daughter-in-law was laid up, suffering from a severe attack of bronchitis. In this distressful state of her domestic affairs poor Mrs. Lee

could not attempt to entertain her visitors in any seemly fashion. She could not so much as ask them to sit down, except with their feet in a puddle of water. Their kindest course obviously was to depart as soon as might be, and so it came to pass that they presently were trudging tealessly home, instead of consuming the hot-buttered slim-cakes, on which Vi had expatiated, seasoned with the compliments by which she had expected to be embarrassed most enjoyably.

Even if Mrs. Lee had had an opportunity for offering them, however, it seems doubtful that she could have done so with much sincerity. Brief as had been her observation of "Miss Vi's intended," it had enabled her to form about him a strong opinion, not greatly to his advantage. Something of this she expressed to Miss Mio, who two or three days afterwards called with her cousins to inquire for Mrs. Paddy. Several years' experience had led Mrs. Lee to rely implicitly on the discreetness of little Miss Mio, whom she had often entrusted with views of her own, which she found it impolitic to publish, and irksome entirely to suppress. It appeared now that Mr. Hill-Clarke had failed to satisfy her in certain points which she regarded as infallible criteria of character. Among others: "I can tell you one thing, Miss Mio, and that's not two: I'd never trust anybody the length of me arm that had his eyes set so close together in his head. There isn't the length of your little finger between them. And a face on him all the while as long as an old cow's."

There were some grounds, in fact, for this impression, which was heightened by Mr. Hill-Clarke's ill-judged practice of brushing his stiff dark hair straight up off his forehead and wearing a pointed beard. Lines in his face seemed to run slightly crooked, as if losing straightness by undue elongation.

"I wonder," said Mio, "whether that was what made him untrustable?"

"What was, Miss Mio?" said Mrs. Lee.

"His eyes being so close together," Mio said. "I suppose he couldn't help their being put in that way."

And therewith the subject dropped.

Before they had got half-way home, Vi and her companion were caught in an icy downpour, whence they emerged thoroughly drenched and out of humour. To Vi, as she furled her dripping umbrella in the porch, Fred advanced facetiously and began: "I say, Vi, this must be uncommonly bad for your interesting in——" But she called him a "great vulgar donkey," quite in the manner of an old-world schoolroom quarrel, as, brushing past him, she ran upstairs.

When Gilbert Hill-Clarke descended in dry but chilly garments, he came upon Mio, reading near the fire in the empty breakfast-room. His mood was gloomy, for while he changed his clothes, he had been wondering how he should get through the rest of that day; and he had then gone on to doubt whether an indefinitely long series of tedious days might not lie before him. Vi had really made herself a great nuisance, dragging him off through the wet to visit that dreadful old woman. Of course when once all the wedding tomfoolery was over, and he settled again in his own house, he could take good care not to be let in for things of the kind. Still, he wasn't as sure as he would like to be that he hadn't made an ass of himself. As the more he reflected in the shadow of his present discontent, the less sure he grew, it occurred to him that he might as well shift the scene of his thoughts by entering into conversation with Mio. "What book have you got there, Miss Mio?" he asked. "Fairytales, I suppose."

"The name of the book," said Mio, "is 'The Parents' Assistant,' but the name of the story I was going to read is: 'Waste Not want Not, or Two Strings to your Bow.'"

"Excellent advice, indeed," he said; "not that you will begin to trouble yourself about extra strings to your bow yet awhile, I should fancy."

"I thought it would be about fiddle bow-strings," said Mio, "but it's all only about old arrow bow-strings; so perhaps I won't read any more of it."

"No doubt you can find another just as improving," he said. "Is there one called, 'Look before you Leap'?"

Mio referred to the table of contents, and examined it carefully. "There isn't," she said. "I suppose you must have read it in some other book."

"Oh, my dear child, I never read any such story," he said, "though I've a notion that I could tell it, right enough."

"About looking and leaping?" Mio inquired with interest.

"Why, yes," said Mr. Hill-Clarke. "You see, I know somebody who once took a great leap without looking as long as he ought—maybe, considering the size of it."

To speak in this riddling way of his own affairs gave him some little pleasure, enhanced by a slight flavour of riskiness. He felt clever and cynical.

"Was it as great, I wonder, as the one Joe Devlin's horse took at the point-to-point races?" said Mio. "Everybody said he threw the biggest lep that ever was seen: over the high furze-bank and right across Creedy brook."

Mr. Hill-Clarke laughed derisively. "A brook and a bank! That was nothing to it, I assure you. Why, it

landed him all the way, so to speak, from Drisk to Craignogue."

"Oh, then it was you," said Mio. "But I didn't know that it was a made-up story—mostly."

Rather taken aback by this promptly personal application of his ingenious parable, he set about disclaiming: "Well, of course, I knew you wouldn't quite believe all that. Do you know what fables are? This was just a fable with the proverb about looking before you leap for a moral."

"I think it ought to be: 'Look before you don't leap,'" said Mio, "because if you look, and then leap all the same, it doesn't seem to make any difference." She glanced wistfully at her open book, as if she would like to resume her reading.

"You're a queer young person, Miss Mio," he said, relieved to observe that she was occupied with those larger philosophic aspects of the question, which had no special bearing on himself, and which threatened no awkward references.

"She is as queer a little codger as you'd run across in most places," said Jack Quin, suddenly rearing himself up on the sofa in an adjacent recess, where he had been lying flat out of sight. Mr. Hill-Clarke stared at him disconcertedly. Jack's hair, wildly on end, and a blinking of his eyes, gave him the appearance of being neither long nor widely awake, and Mr. Hill-Clarke hoped that this was the case; but the fact could not well be ascertained, and he wished that he had held his tongue. The discovery of an unsuspected audience, in conjunction with a doubt as to how much has been overheard thereby and understood, is, generally speaking, a disagreeable incident, and it was so now. Nor did it prove to be the last in his evening. For before bedtime his voice became hoarse, and other symptoms developing, showed that his

wet walk had given him a cold; whereat he was aggrieved and Vi was conscience-stricken, while the foreseeing among her family apprehended with exasperation that it would spread through the household. It was an appropriate conclusion to the unchanciness of the day.

CHAPTER IX

THAT day, a day of misfortunes, was not by any means typical, and its shortcomings were speedily forgotten. The weather took up, colds were cured, and things began to go merrily again. At Mallymaquilty Farm took place a highly successful tea-party, when Mrs. Lee's slim-cakes swam in golden butter, and honeyed flattery steeped all her speech. A recent photograph showed that Hariette Hill-Clarke's looks were not incongruously venerable. And soon afterwards Mrs. Fenlow, who had gone to Dublin, wrote making what seemed a very happy suggestion about a possible page. She had heard through her mother-in-law that Mrs. Armitage and her boy would be visiting friends within easy reach of Craiganogue just about the time of the wedding. So why not borrow little Alfred for the occasion? "He is a remarkably nice-looking child," she wrote; "there could be no comparison between him and poor Bobkins in that respect. I hear that she thinks no end of him, and I should say that she would be glad of an opportunity for showing him off a bit. As expense is no object to her, I daresay she would rig him out in a really handsome costume, and make him quite a decorative object." It was a weakness of Mrs. Fenlow to regard herself as artistic, and she endeavoured after the use of the correct terms.

At this suggestion Vi's desire for a page, which had been thrust down by unfavouring circumstances, sprang

up again as irrepressibly as a jack-in-the-box. She took action without delay. An invitation was at the earliest possible moment dispatched to Mrs. Armitage, and her reply appeared most satisfactory and just what could have been wished. Mrs. Armitage would not come to sleep at Craiganogue ("which would really have been a great nuisance," said Mrs. Quin, "for there's not a decent room she could have had"), but would drive over from the hotel at Lismartin where she would be staying, and she was delighted that little Alfred should act as page. Then a few days later she sent, along with the sweetest pearl and emerald pendant for the bride-elect, a design for a charming page's costume, accompanied by an inquiry whether, if the two children were to be train-bearers, she could save any trouble by ordering a frock to match for little Hermione Helveran. That, too, seemed a proposal much to be commended, and was accepted forthwith. Everybody considered Mrs. Fenlow to have distinguished herself as a giver of valuable good advice.

Nobody guessed that Mio, the small and quiet, had anything to do with bringing about its fortunate results. But as a matter of fact, Mrs. Armitage was giving herself a considerable amount of trouble, which she would not have done had it not been that she wished for a sight of Denis Helveran's little girl, who had so nearly become her adopted daughter, and whom she still sometimes regretted as lost to her in that capacity. Not that she was in any way dissatisfied with her second choice; far from it. Only day by day she foresaw more clearly how it must become increasingly unlike what her first would have been.

One pleasant October morning she drove over from Lismartin to Craiganogue for the purpose of introducing Alfred and trying on Mio's frock. When, after rather

prolonged research, that young person had been unearthed from the remotely situated corner, which she was sharing with "Masterman Ready," and had been dressed in her pretty white and blue, amid reproaches for the keeping of herself out of the way, that her elders would have counted to her as righteousness, if someone had not happened to want her, the two children made each other's acquaintance in the drawing-room, where they were for the moment a main centre of interest. With respect to stature they were not a very well-matched pair, even allowing for the twelve months' difference between their ages, Alfred being as much more than common tall for his years as Mio was less for hers. On other points they showed a marked resemblance. Black hair, soft and thick, squarely chiselled foreheads, straightly pencilled eyebrows and dark grey-blue eyes. Both had clear, fine-grained skins, but the boy was sun-browned, and the girl as colourless nearly as a noon-blanchèd moon. Watching them, this contrast suggested to Mrs. Armitage the homelier comparison of a brown hen-egg and a white. Thence she went on to think that Mio did give one rather the impression of a bit of egg-shell china, but more of those frail groundling blossoms—were they called *nemophila*?—whose filmy petals bore flecks of velvety black and sapphire blue. "When she has grown taller," Mrs. Armitage thought on, "people will say she's like white, black-hearted poppies and ermine-caped moths, and other larger things; at present she reminds me of those strange little low-growing flowers. Certainly there is a likeness between her and Alfred: the same peculiar-coloured eyes, and their faces that almost peaky oval shape."

Meanwhile Alfred began to make conversation with the help of a clue given him by having heard that Mio had been found hidden away with a book.

"I suppose you're very fond, indeed, of reading?" he said. "Is that what you like doing best? I like it too awfully sometimes, when we can't be out. But mostly I'd rather be drawing or taking things in pieces—things that go by machinery, you know."

"I like reading very much," said Mio, "but I like better playing on Mick Moynihan's fiddle."

"Her father's daughter," Mrs. Armitage said to herself, with a pang of regret. "One of the very things that made me want to have her. She could have had every chance. . . . Will these people take any trouble about it, or would they be able to make arrangements for her lessons and so on? There's such an antediluvian atmosphere here, that I shouldn't wonder if they thought remarkable musical gifts were somehow unladylike, if not actually impious and improper."

"Oh," said Alfred, more surprised than he considered it polite to show. "I never tried that. Do you play on it a great deal?"

"Only when Mick comes to the kitchen to see Kate Hely," Mio said a little sadly. "And he doesn't come so very often since the roads got bad; his stick catches in the deep mud, and he says that goes agin him. But whenever he's here, he sits on the bank in the cow-lane to rest for a bit after he's had his tea, and then he shows me the tunes on his fiddle that I can play. There are some other ones that he says I can't make an offer at till my fingers are as long as a grasshopper's hind-legs. I wish they were, and I stretch them as much as I can. When the bank's too wet, we sit in the old cart-shed, but there's not much light in it, and horrid cobwebs in the corners. I'm afraid of the spiders coming out to listen."

Mio's account of her musical studies interested Mrs. Armitage so much more than Mrs. Quin's description of various wedding-garments that her remarks thereon

were interpolated generally at random between her efforts to overhear.

"It must be jolly to play tunes," Alfred said, and he added encouragingly: "I daresay your fingers will soon grow as long as my arm."

"Maybe so," Mio said doubtfully; "but I hope that Mick won't have gone away with himself and his fiddle before they do."

"I'm sure they'll be no loss if he does," said Carrie, who was standing, on one leg, near her cousin. In a shapeless chocolate-brown overall, with her light hair all a wide-spreading rough mop about her large face and shoulders, above Mio so little and so elfinly attired, she towered bulkily enough to have been imagined, by comparison, a juvenile ogress, strayed from the fastnesses of some huge-framed race. "It's like nothing on earth except two old cats fighting up in a tree," she said, "screeching and yawping and yowling." She could not refrain from saying something disagreeable to counterbalance the gross unfairness of that marvellous frock, which surpassed all that she had ever seen, and she knew that disparagement of the fiddle would outrage Mio's feelings.

"That's only when it's being tuned," said Mio, "and it's not *very* like cats even then. You don't hear it rightly, Carrie, because you've no ears—inside ones, I mean. You know Miss Brannock always says so when you're practising."

It may have been fortunate that tea at this point interrupted the conversation, which was not resumed.

On their drive home Alfred inquired of Mrs. Armitage whether fiddles and violins were machines. After some reflection and with a diffident sense of speaking profanely, she replied that she supposed they partly were.

"For if they are," he said, "when I've learned how

to make all manner of machines, I'll make a fiddle for the little girl they called Mio; a very small one, that will be handier for her than the old man's."

About the same time Mio's Uncle Charlie asked her what she thought of the young gentleman who was to help her to keep Vi from trailing her fine clothes through the dust or mud, as the case might be. When Mio had identified him with the biggish stranger boy, she replied with decision:

"I like himself, but I'm glad that he doesn't live here. "Because," she continued, in answer to her uncle's question, "he likes, best of all, taking everything to pieces; and just fancy if he took Mick Moynihan's fiddle! Things that boys take in pieces *never*," she averred solemnly and slowly, shaking her head, "are any good again, at all."

The wedding-day arrived auspiciously, favoured by the fairest weather of a fine October and general high spirits. Vi was radiant, the bridegroom smiled with a reflection of her felicity, brightened perhaps by an underlying consciousness that he had a short time before advantageously invested one thousand pounds. Even Carrie took a tolerably contented view of her treatment, a companion bridesmaid having been found for her, so that she would not occupy the position of fool in the middle with which her brethren had threatened her annoyingly. A much-admired feature in the bridal procession was due to a modified form of Mrs. Fenlow's flower-sacks. As the season of profuse blossoms was past, somebody conceived the happy idea of substituting for them the berries which abounded on every hedge. Accordingly the bridesmaids carried an ample store of scarlet rose-hips, coral-red rowan-berries, claret-coloured elderberries, fiery golden barberries, crimson haws, and many other wild-growing fruits, with which the flagged

pathway betwixt church gate and church door glowed thickly bestrewn. However picturesque, indeed, the effect was not appreciated on the ensuing Sunday by a congregation making its approach over the unswept flags, whereon the softer berries were crushed into an ill-bestowed jam, while the harder ones rolled small insidious stumbling-blocks underfoot. But for the time—the momentous time—being they seemed an unqualified success. Mrs. Fenlow, complacently surveying the scene, looked forward to the report in the *Barradrum Herald*, and hoped that fitting prominence would be given to an innovation so thoroughly chic. Though in this she was not disappointed, the report very signally failed to satisfy her. For it stated that the costume worn by the bride's mother was trimmed with real lace, which, declared Mrs. Fenlow, spoiled the whole thing. Her sister could not see it. "If they had said it was imitation, now, that," she admitted, "*would* have been provoking."

As the black heads of the two youthful train-bearers went by, Mrs. Fenlow dived in imagination further into the future, and she meaningly remarked to Mrs. Armitage, her neighbour, that they made a very pretty little couple. "And their turn will be coming, too, before we know where we are!" Across Mrs. Armitage's mind likewise had flashed the thought that it would be a queer freak of fortune if, one of these days, her old friend's granddaughter did, after all, become indirectly her adopted child. Not caring to enlarge upon it, however, she replied matter-of-factly: "I ought really to have had Alfred's hair cut; it grows at such a surprising rate, and is so outlandishly thick, that it is beginning to make him look quite top-heavy again."

The festivities at Craiganogue, of course, extended to the kitchen regions, where very naturally Mick Moynihan with his fiddle was a welcome guest. After the departure

of Mr. and Mrs. Hill-Clarke, the inevitable flatness was experienced by the party left behind, the younger members of whom, to enliven themselves, devised an impromptu dance in the hall. That Mick was on the premises ready to supply the dancers' music seemed a lucky chance to everybody, and nobody doubted his readiness any more than his competence to perform. But on this great day the cups which had been going round were of more potency than even the blackest stewed tea, and when Mick, hobbling in from the kitchen, had twisted himself across the hall, and established himself on a bench in the corner where coats and waterproofs hung, he soon found an irresistible drowsiness stealing over him. More than once did its onset break the slender thread of a tune which was guiding the dancers' steps; and then to his rescue came an assistant not less effectual, though hardly more imposing, than the ancient harpist's grasshopper. And this was how it happened that Charlie Quin, on making his way with an offer of refreshments to the shadowy corner, beheld, and marvelled at beholding, his very small niece, fiddle under chin, rendering with much spirit the air of "Garry Owen," while Mick Moynihan leaned his head back into the wall-angle, and dozed in the comfortable consciousness of a devolved duty. Mio's accomplishment was quite a new revelation to her uncle, who had known nothing of its existence. She had never spoken to her elders of its acquisition, keeping silence from an instinctive misgiving that her lessons might turn out to be one of the things which they were always liable to place, puzzlingly and frustratingly, under a mysterious taboo.

The discovery caused him a vague uneasiness, for which he could not account, at any rate, without considering the matter more deeply than he cared to do. It was not that he had any objection to Mio's fiddling;

rather he watched the little monkey's performance with admiring amusement. She must be really clever to have picked it up that way. Then he thought of her father's musical gifts. Excellent judges had been of the opinion that Denis Helveran would have done well to take up music as his profession, but he was never able to afford the training, the long study abroad, and the unremunerative years. His engagement to Hermione had put that career out of the question for him. Had he, Charlie wondered, handed on the possibility of it to his daughter? If so, there would be nothing to hinder her from taking it up; no lack of means, at least. Those temporarily borrowed thousands would have been re-invested, far more profitably, before expensive studies would put any strain on her income. Still, something ought to be done at once about getting a governess who could play decently. The present one, Miss What's-her-name—the balloon-fish—strummed unmercifully. They might get one who played the violin, as lots of girls do nowadays, and then the little imp would not be left entirely to the instructions of Mick Moynihan. He must get Ethel to see about it when they had settled down a bit.

Before that indefinite date arrived, however, he would probably have forgotten all about Mio's fiddling, had it not been for an incident which happened a few days later, when he was nearly on the point of setting off to Dublin. He was going there on business. The blunder of the stock-broker's clerk had put into his hands a thousand pounds over and above Vi's dowry, and he was disposed to regard this as an opportunity which it would be a worse blunder to let slip. There were, indeed, many ways of employing it obviously more profitable than simply bottling it up again in some investment. Most urgently inviting among these was the chance of opening a prospect for Fred, who continued with in-

creased impatience to desire a military career. As a youth, Charlie Quin had himself cherished, and been thwarted in, the same aspiration, which he would gladly have seen fulfilled in the person of his favourite son. But the expense had hitherto seemed beyond his means.

Now, therefore, having so conveniently come into possession of larger resources, the longer he considered the subject the clearer he saw how downright wrong it would be to let a mere punctilious scruple stand in the way of a young fellow's advantage. It would be acting on the letter instead of the spirit, and deliberately flying in the face of Providence—both reprehensible courses. Of such arguments a visit to Dublin for inquiries about grinding and boarding was a logical consequence. He had also made up his mind that he would, when there, invest five hundred pounds in a nitrates company, which paid splendid interest, and was highly recommended in the "Advice to Investors" column of the journal whereby he swore. This stock was just then so low, and the dividends so high, that Mio would be losing hardly a penny, even if she were getting nothing on the borrowed fifteen hundred. Certainly, it was not trustee stock, and, strictly speaking, he should not have anything to do with it; but the fact that, strictly speaking, he should not adopt a line of conduct always appeared to him to be a point intrinsically in its favour, and this was no exception.

When twilight was falling on the evening before his departure, he happened to stroll along the cow-lane, and there he came upon Mio, standing alone in the middle of the grassy, deep-rutted track. Her eyes were fixed on its turn, towards which the form of Mick Moynihan was to be seen laboriously limping. As the fiddler vanished out of sight, her uncle, who unperceived had come up close behind her, noticed that she sighed deeply,

and nodded her head twice or thrice in a strangely rueful, despairing sort of way.

"So old Mick's gone," he said. "Has he been giving you a lesson?"

Mio looked round, startled, but not diverted from her grief. "Mick's going all the way to Bantry," she said. "He says he always puts in the winter with his sister that lives there, and married a carman. So he'll not ever be coming back here again."

"And I suppose you'll miss his visits. Is that what you're looking like a solemn little owl about?" said her uncle. "Mick seems to be an old friend of yours."

Solemnly enough Mio shook her head. "I like Mick pretty middling well," she said, "but if he hadn't took away his fiddle, I wouldn't much mind that he'd gone along with himself."

"Oh, I see; the fiddle's the friend, not poor Mick," said her uncle.

"A friend can't be a fiddle," Mio said, with a touch of remorseful apology; "a fiddle's the only thing you can do practising on. So it's very dreadful to have none at all, except an old broken-up one that's no good for anything but lighting fires. I won't ever be able now to keep my wrists soople, and my fingers limber-like. They'll be as stiff as bits of stick, and as clumsy as if they were tied on with loose ends of string," she lamented, quoting, it seemed, from some adverse criticism, and mournfully contemplating her own hands, which, though spread out with unnatural rigidity, were but a diminutive pair. "Now they'll never be any use for anything, no matter how big they are, not if they grow *twice* the size of yours, and no matter how far I can stretch, I'll never play a tune again."

She spoke as if stating simple facts, which, however melancholy, must be accepted as inevitable, and she

recited them without the remotest intention of seeking thereby to procure a fiddle. Her hopes of ever possessing one were buried in the old violin-case, and their existence would have kept her silent, such being the construction of her mind.

"Never's a long day," her uncle began, breaking off as a cry of "Charlie" was shrilled from a back window in the house. "I say, there's your Aunt Ethel calling me. I suppose she's packing my portmanteau, and can't find some of my things." He went indoors, but Mio stood still where she was for a long time, and looked down the darkening lane. She felt as she might have done if a heavenly door had been shut and locked against her, and she had known that Mick Moynihan was vanishing further and further out of her reach, with the key in his pocket.

Yet after not more than three or four days of exclusion that key was put into her hand. On the evening of Charlie Quin's return from Dublin, she had been dejectedly keeping watch, in a corner of the chilly hall, on the door of the book-room, in hopes that her uncle and aunt, who were talking there, would soon come out and let her slip in to rummage among the shelves. But these humbler hopes were forgotten in the grand event which actually came to pass. Ever afterwards she remembered how she had seen her uncle, crossing the hall, open the door of the schoolroom and exclaim: "Ah, she isn't here—I was looking for Mio." How they had met midway and he had suddenly put into her arms something smooth and long-shaped, bidding her hold it while he took off the lid; and how, when the lid was off, he had said: "Well now, Miss Mio, what do you think of that for a fiddle?" And there lay a lovely little violin, shining in the glare of the unshaded hall-lamp.

What Mio did think of it she was quite unable to say;

she could only gaze and gaze at it with her owl's eyes growing in largeness and brightness, until at last she looked up and wondered aloud: "And will you sometimes lend it to me, like Mick Moynihan, to play on a little bit in the evening? And maybe teach me some new tunes?"

"My dear child, I couldn't play the ghost of a tune if it was to save all our lives," he said, "so you will have to do all the teaching, and all the lending into the bargain, for this little fiddle belongs to yourself."

"Just in fun," Mio said, with a smile which counterfeited amused appreciation of the joke very creditably, though wistfulness would not be banished from her eyes.

"Not a bit in fun," her uncle assured her. "Didn't I get it for you in a big Dublin music shop, with a gramophone bawling on one side and a piano being tuned on the other? I wouldn't ever have ventured into such a place for fun."

Still, Mio found it hard to credit her good fortune, and when conviction at last came irresistibly flowing in, it almost overwhelmed her. "To be paying all those lots and lots of shillings, when you don't want to have it yourself!" she said, marvelling. "And did you get it for me to practise on? I'll practise it always, so I will; and I'll learn all the tunes that ever were. I'll find them in the strings for myself. I'm sorry it was such a dreadfully dear thing to be buying; but I'm gladder of having it than anything else in the world. I thought I'd never see a sight of a fiddle again."

In somewhat different circumstances her delight would have given Charlie Quin many shillingsworth of pleasure. As things were, it was dashed by intrusive considerations about ways and means. They constrained him to view the gift as a very small act of restitution on his part; a dreary aspect of the matter, from which he turned as

quickly as he could. When his wife heard of it, she said she thought it was rather absurd to get a real violin for a child like Mio, who would probably very soon be quite tired of it, and break it up. Not wishing to discuss the subject, he replied hastily that Mio seemed to have a great deal more sense than most children; a remark which Mrs. Quin resented, as an implicit disparagement of her own flock. So she rejoined tartly that, to her mind, anything more tiresome than priggish, old-fashioned children could not be imagined; and that Mio was getting a great look of poor Frances Helveran, her father's sister, who had always seemed a rather dead-and-alive sort of creature—not an atom clever. And she added that Mio must practise her fiddling somewhere out of hearing, as it was a most disagreeable noise.

No difficulties about Mio's practising did, however, arise. That very evening's post brought a letter from Mrs. Armitage, asking for a loan of Mio to carry off with her southwards, whither she would now convey her household. The two children would be nice companions for one another. Valerie Marsigny played the violin charmingly, and had a real gift for teaching music, which was thrown away on Alfred, who seemed to have no talent of that kind; so she would be delighted to have Mio for a pupil. This plan, which involved little trouble, had, from Mrs. Quin's point of view, much to recommend it, especially as Miss Brannock's departure on a holiday immediately after the wedding made the absence of the small child all the more convenient. Arrangements were accordingly concluded with dispatch, and the next day but one saw Mio starting on the first considerable journey that she had ever to her own knowledge undertaken.

Before the car drove off from the hall door an alarm was raised that Mio's violin had been forgotten; where-

upon Jack, good-natured and blundering, rushed upstairs and brought down from the lumber-room the useless old case, stuffing it, amid denunciations of his stupidity, into the well of the car, in which the right one had meanwhile been found. Then Mio nearly toppled down from her high seat in leaning forward to shake hands with him. She did earnestly wish that he was coming too, and felt sorrier to leave him behind than even the new violin. As the house disappeared from sight, she wished that *everybody* was coming, too, even Claws, the cross sandy cat.

Thus it came about that on the eve of her seventh birthday she was transported into widely different surroundings.

CHAPTER X

LETTERBRACK lies turning its face chiefly seawards, at the foot of the long, leisurely slope of the hillside from which it takes its name. A legend relates that some wandering Druid once put a spell on this slope, forbidding it ever to be seen twice the same colour; and if he so did, his spell certainly has proved efficacious. But there seems really to have been no need for any druidical intervention, as the shifting lights and shadows of the skies, flung over mingled hues of rocks and plants, with their leafage and blossom changed from day to day by the seasons' difference, quite sufficiently account for such a result. The village is nearly the middle point on the coast-line running between those boldly thrust-out promontories Kinkyle northward, and, southward, Rossorna, which define the spacious Shanport Bay. That other line of Atlantic foam, which borders it unbroken, touches here and there on tracts of firm, silvery sand, on belts of iron-grey shingle and boulders draped with tawny weed, on sheer cliff walls, and on swarded banks, where trefoil and eyebright taste the brine in company with sea-pinks and sea-holly. On the left hand, one who faces the ocean has Glenbrie, a valley shut in by a rampart of cliffs, breached only where the river flows out, fighting a course for itself down a ruggedly encumbered strand. To the right, Glenasnagh opens

widely oceanwards, a recess curving softly back to a girdle of low hills, and all a mosaic of shaded green, wrought by fields and fences.

It was to Letterbrack that Mrs. Armitage brought her high-piled car and cart, driven through the slanted autumn sunshine from the last station, not at all worthy to be called a terminus, on the light railway, which stopped some miles short of her journey's end. The house, an aspectable building of grey granite and red tiles, was set in a very green nook, amid lawns and gardens, on which its ample windows glittered. Mio had never before seen a roof of tiles nor one that covered so much glass; and when its peaked gables and wide-flashing panes came into view as they drove out of a Scotch-fir grove, she was strongly impressed by its air of gaiety and brightness, which she could not easily associate with real life.

"What do you think of it, Mio?" Alfred, who sat beside her, inquired, hoping for a favourable opinion of the place which he admired and liked.

For a moment she surveyed it, and then: "If I was as big as those trees," she said, waving a hand at the tall, ruddy stems, "I think I'd like to keep it in a box, and take it out and set it up on wet days when I hadn't much to do."

"Oh, but I say, it isn't as small as all that, you know," Alfred protested, slightly hurt, for having spent the greater part of the last three years there, he regarded it as his home, and hence as part of himself, which could not be without some derogatoriness dwarfed into a plaything.

"I didn't mean that it was very small, really," said Mio, feeling unable to explain her sense of beholding something which struck her as ornamental beyond her experience of the workaday world. "Only the way

that houses are small in books of pictures when they're pretty."

"I see," Alfred said rather doubtfully. "We have lots of picture-books and some toy-houses, that *you* are not a bit too old to play with as long as you like." Having made this suggestion, he deemed that he had for the present discharged his duties as to the entertainment of his guest; and upon arriving slipped off to the yard, where he inspected several favourite animals before the early dusk crept out of nooks and corners.

The next day was Mio's birthday, and in the afternoon she received the first letter that she had ever had in her life, unless you count a few Christmas cards. It came from her cousin Carrie, and the envelope bulged with a small object round which the letter itself was wrapped. Unfolded, there emerged a pen-wiper of black cloth, surmounted by a pink leather pig, with a green shamrock spray in its mouth; on its side "Good Luck" was printed in green letters, and a strip of stiff paper gummed at its feet had borne the inscription: "A Present from Galway," but no longer adhered. Mio knew that it had been given to Carrie by Jack, and was a prized possession. Carrie wrote badly with pale ink on dark-grey paper, and Mio could have made nothing of the crooked lines on the crumpled sheet without Mrs. Armitage's help.

"DEAR MIO," wrote Carrie, "Jack says he does not care a rush if I send you the 'Pig' pen-wiper for your birthday, and so I wish you a happy return, and you are not stuck uper than Fred, for he thinks himself a general now. Prim was looking for you under the schoolroom sopher, but Jack has taken him for a walk. So I am your loving cousin,

"CARRIE."

This letter, with its enclosure, was an act of remorse ; because a day or two before, when the others made their little presentations to Mio, antedating her birthday as she would be away from home on the anniversary, Carrie had audibly remarked that people who were going on visits were too stuck up to want anything else, and had offered no gift. Her attitude had been rather embarrassing to Mio, who would have liked to disclaim both pride and greed, but was kept silent by the difficulty of doing so. Now she looked a little home-sickly at the pink pig, which had always lived on the top of a dumpy "Pilgrim's Progress" in Carrie's shelf of the school-room book-case. Though it was a place from which she had generally been glad to escape, the glamour of absence filled the familiar room with an alluring atmosphere. All such spells, however, were for the time being speedily broken by several pleasant distractions. In the first place, Mrs. Armitage, on learning from the letter that it was Mio's birthday, declared an intention of celebrating it after tea by producing a new game brought from Dublin for the solace of their long evenings. Furthermore, she gave Mio a silver pencil-case, which had the property of elongating itself in a wonderful and fascinating manner. It was employed without delay on a letter to Carrie, a short one, as Mio still wrote so largely and slowly that her style could not be otherwise than terse :

"DEAR CARRIE,—The Pig is very butifull, but I wish you were It.

"Your loving cousin,

"MIO."

Then Alfred, who looked into the drawing-room on his way out of doors, heard of the event and ran off, quickly

to reappear with a big illustrated volume, in which he had hurriedly inscribed a hope that Mio would live for nineteen hundred times nineteen hundred years. To Mrs. Armitage he accounted for this portentous wish by explaining that the number was a perfect square, and he left her contemplating the idiosyncrasies, literary and scientific, of her young charges with the somewhat puzzled interest which subjects of the sort are apt to rouse.

But, as for Mio, the outcome of the matter which most deeply concerned her was that finding herself a privileged person, she took courage when asked what she would like to do, and said: "To try to play a tune on my new fiddle." Whereupon Valerie Marsigny fell in with these views so enthusiastically, and played such lovely tunes herself, and showed how and explained so patiently and clearly, that Mick Moynihan's former pupil spent a thoroughly enjoyable hour in learning and unlearning, while the world of delight on the threshold of which she stood widened all its horizon and grew more marvellous in its magic.

Alfred meanwhile went down the avenue, until near the road-gate he turned into a steep grass field on the right, and crossed it by a footpath, which, continuing along the crest of some tall sea-cliffs, descended with him to the beach, at a place where the rock wall was broken, and a little cove lay deep in fine silvery sand. It looked south-westward, over a clear-blue sea, and at this early afternoon hour it basked in the mellow October sunbeams, which still bore a mild after-glow of summer fire. The sand felt quite warm to his touch as he knelt down on a particularly smooth patch, not far above high-water mark, and began to work busily with his hands. He was filling up with small rounded pebbles the outlines of a diagram traced on the sand, firm here as well

as soft and fine. These pebbles he took from a heap lying ready for use, carefully matched in shape and size. The collection of them, together with the drawing and lettering of his rather complicated lines, had occupied him the greater part of that morning. Evidently he was working against time, absorbed in an effort to finish, and time nearly got the better of him.

Just as he completed the filling of his last letter, a portly D, voices sounded in the sandy-banked boreen leading through the cleft in the cliffs on to the shore.

"By the powers of smoke!" he said, jumping up, "here they all are." Round the corner they came into sight. First, a small, dark, elderly man walked arm-in-arm with a tall young one; nothing more was noticeable at that distance. They were followed by a figure whose contours immediately suggested the conventional Mrs. Noah of the ancient toy. A faded violet garment of the dressing-gown type enveloped her comprehensively, and round a little knob of a cloth-cap rose a fuzz of grizzled hair, which might be likened at fancy to a turban or to a bird's-nest. Last came a rather short, thin, middle-aged man in working clothes, who carried a wicker arm-chair, camp stools and rugs. Any stranger to Letterbrack who had inquired of a resident concerning this procession would probably have been informed much as follows:

"Them do be Mr. and Miss Madden from Drumatin House a bit above along the road there; and Captain Delaney that's living with them this good while back. Dark he is, poor gentleman; he couldn't tell this minute was the sun over his head or the moon. And Larry Fahy carrying their contraptions was soldier-servant to the Captain when they were in the army together; now he's in the Reserve. The Captain does be sitting awhile down

here on the strand most days that are anyways decent at all; but, sure, them that hasn't the sight of their eyes, the Lord may pity them, might as well be in one place as another."

"Ha! there's the Sapper," said David Madden. "I thought he was pretty sure to turn up." Alfred had acquired for himself this cognomen by the account he had given of the operations in which he was engaged when three or four years back he had for the first time met Captain Delaney on the beach. "So now, Clementina and I had better go on to the Nolans, and do our business there, while the water's low enough. We're leaving you in good company: the young scamp with six months' experiences to relate will talk nineteen to the dozen."

As he ran towards them over the muffling sand, Alfred knew that his footsteps gave no warning, and he announced his approach by a shout: "Hullo, Captain, there you are!" Captain Delaney held out his hand in the direction of the voice, and Alfred took hold of it, much to the satisfaction of both, very obviously, though neither of them said anything more than "Hullo!" again.

"Now don't you be talking the Captain's head off, Sapper," Miss Madden said, coming forward. On a nearer view it might be observed that a belt at the back of her long garment hung unfastened with dangling ends, that her shoe-laces were of red-and-white twine, and that she carried on her arm an empty plaited-grass basket, which drooped flat against her side, flaccid and wraith-pale. Her face was so tanned and old-glove-like in texture, that buttons for eyes would have seemed hardly more incongruous than did her own, being of a clear hazel, youthfully brilliant.

"If your tongue has grown as much in proportion as

the rest of you," she continued, "you might chatter till the end of time. So mind you run off after a bit and amuse yourself."

"But we're not going to talk, you know," said Alfred, "not *talky* talk, anyhow; we've got lots to do."

"Ah, come along with yourself out of that, Clementina woman, and don't waste our time giving bad advice," said David Madden. "Delaney looks as if you had recommended him to leave out a dozen bars in the middle of Handel's 'Largo,' or some other favourite composition. Let them talk according to their own ideas."

As the Maddens set off, Alfred said: "Now we're in peace. And will you come and look at a thing I want to show you over there?"

In order to look at Alfred's diagram, Lambert Delaney had to kneel down on the sand, and feel along the raised lines of pebbles. This he did easily enough, with a little guidance from Alfred, and soon he exclaimed: "By Jove! Why, it's the Forty-seventh Prop. You young rascal, have you got into the Second Book? Yes . . . you've got all the construction as right as a trivet, as far as that goes."

Alfred proved most satisfactorily that he thoroughly understood it all, and added: "I learned it at the class in Dublin; but I'd ten times rather be learning Euclid here. Mr. Gardiner said I had a long start of his other boys, because I'd had such superior teaching; and I told him it was a great deal easier to do things on sand than on paper; but I don't think that paper really makes much difference. It would do just as well if he had more sense himself. All the same, we finished the Second Book. And I can come to begin the Third whenever you like."

They began it on the spot, and over that and kindred

subjects pored so long with such absorbing interest that the space between the clear-gold circle of the sun and clear azure rim of the ocean-water dwindled into a narrow strait, and the level rays falling through ever wider fields of air, sent the shadows of man and boy stretching away further behind them, and shone point-blank into their faces.

"It's dazzling me so that I can hardly see," Alfred said, screwing up his eyes as he attempted to draw under instructions certain lines. "I must rub out that one; it's as crooked as a ram's horn."

"I've got the pull over you there, Sapper," Captain Delaney said, with a rather rueful laugh. "All the suns in the universe could contrive to dazzle me as much or as little as the end of a cigar."

The puckered countenance which Alfred turned towards him at this was due not to the sun, but to perplexity about a suitable response. It was a relief that Larry Fahy came up just then and said :

"Beg pardon, sir, but I see Mrs. Armitage above on the path traversing the high field. Will I take a double up to her, and bring her word that Master Alfred's below here, or will I preferably let it alone?"

"She knew I was coming here," Alfred said to Captain Delaney, "and she said she'd maybe come herself and fetch me, for a bit of a walk."

"Oh, then it's all right, Fahy; you needn't mind," said Captain Delaney. "I should think we must be in full view of anybody on the cliff-path."

"If she has Thady the collie with her, I must keep him off our diagrams, or he'll trot them all over paw-marks," Alfred said a little anxiously. "Did you see him, Fahy?"

"I seen such description of a creature follying after her, Master Alfred, and spyng in and out among the

furzes ; but I couldn't rightly say was it Thady," said Fahy. "That's the great strategem you have laid out there, sir. Schames, I should suppose, for some manner of fortifications with them outlying squares, real commodious and convenient."

While Alfred explained to Fahy, whose admiration and interest therefore waned, the non-military nature of their work, Mrs. Armitage had made her way down to the strand, and approached them preceded by Thady's headlong rush. His irrepressible desire to bounce about on exactly the place which he should have avoided led Alfred to lure him off towards the foam-fringe, with a promise of flying stones, and when the pair were safely out of earshot, Mrs. Armitage said to Captain Delaney : "Well ?" She looked in Alfred's direction as she spoke, forgetting at the moment that her glance conveyed nothing to the blind man. Then she hurried to put the question more explicitly, though there was, in fact, no need :

"Well, I hope that you're satisfied with his progress ?"

"Amazed I am," he said. "He's done more than I should have expected of him in double the time, though I knew he wasn't stupid."

"Did you, really ?" she said ironically. "But you needn't mind about 'letting on' that way to me, you know, for you can't think more of him than I do. Stupid, indeed ! I have all manner of masters' reports that I must read to you. But nobody could help liking him, clever or stupid. As it is, he's a splendid child."

"He's been an uncommonly lucky little beggar," said Captain Delaney.

"You must hear him talking French with Valerie Marsigny," said Mrs. Armitage ; "his accent is so remarkably good. And she says that the little letters he writes to her are quite charming."

"All that will be a great advantage to him presently," said Captain Delaney; "for, of course, he'll have to read no end of French science. I'm glad he's good at languages, too; I was always rather a duffer at them myself. Did you say he had grown much? It struck me that he seemed to be taller."

Thus they gloated over their gosling or cygnet, until they came to a point where Mrs. Armitage broke off with a laugh. "However, he is *not* an altogether faultless monster. He so far cares nothing or very little about music, and his theological views are, to say the least of it, utterly heterodox. Not long ago we fell in with two parsons at a *Feis*, and I overheard one of them edifying his neighbour Alfred with pious reflections, to which *he* opposed sheer common sense most politely but firmly. The subject was soon dropped, I noticed."

"Oh, well, if that's his worst failing, he mayn't be very far removed from monstrosity, after all," said Captain Delaney.

"I did admire his mannerliness on that occasion," she said musingly. "Everyone must admit that his manners are excellent."

"*Faultless*," said Captain Delaney.

"When he was told that God loves to hear *little* children like him singing hymns, he said he supposed they *would* sound better a long way off, that was his nearest approach to the discourtesy of answering a fool after his folly; and certainly there had been great provocation given."

"I find him very good company, manners or no," said Captain Delaney.

"And you still are of the same mind about limiting your share of it?" she said, keeping out of her tone the anxiety with which she watched for his answer.

"Only more so," he replied. "You see, Banatie, the

truth is that the longer I sit in this darkness the more determined I am not to let anybody I have a regard for sit in it with me, as far as I have a voice in the matter. If it wasn't that I know the Sapper will soon be going off to school, and getting out of touch with me by force of circumstances, I wouldn't have seen as much of him even as I've risked doing hitherto. I'm mortally afraid of his getting to think too much of me and my affairs. My notion is that he has strong powers of attaching himself, and a lively imagination; and he doesn't seem somehow to acquiesce in things easily—grow used to them and take them for granted. Don't you agree with me?"

"I believe you are right to some extent at least," Mrs. Armitage replied after a pause. She had been watching how the last of the low sunbeams flashed full into her companion's eyes, and the knowledge that he was as unaware of them as if they were shining on a dead wall caused her an irrational stirring of anger which in its unreason seemed to recoil on him with a sort of resentment. It was a painful and unnecessary experience, from the like of which she could not but wish Alfred to be exempt for his own sake, in his long early days, if that were all. But all it was not.

"He does undoubtedly take things to heart," she said, "and the people he cares about are a great deal to him. Still, sometimes when I consider what may happen later on, I can't feel sure that it's right or even expedient to bring him up in ignorance, which he may afterwards regret."

"Nobody can ever feel sure about what's going to happen later on, so that's neither here nor there," said Captain Delaney. "If we can keep regrettable events from him at the present time, that's so much to the good, especially as his experiences now are in a way more

important to him than any he's likely to meet with in the future. They're more vivid and more durable. Don't you remember the length of a day when you were his age? The shrinkage of time-measures—in ordinary circumstances, I mean—seems to me one of the chief changes entailed by advancing years."

"Suppose he comes to think that he should have been given more chances of shortening, or brightening up *your* days?" she suggested. "I don't see how the relationship can permanently be kept from his knowledge; and the discovery may probably—very probably—have that effect."

"Or perhaps quite the contrary," he rejoined, "when he finds how he was disowned and abandoned."

"Oh, you don't really think *that*. I know very well," she declared, and as he could not with any truth gainsay her, he shifted his ground. "We may trust to his common sense, if such a discovery occurs; not that it seems to me by any means inevitable. He'll understand that I had strong reasons for acting on the principle: '*De l'aspect de mon infortune je ne dois pas vous attrister.*' You must remember that in any case he'll be obliged to live, as a rule, out of my reach, and you can't conceive that it would promote his happiness to know he was missed. No; the sensible course clearly is to go on as we have done, letting me have as much of his company as he likes, when opportunity offers, but taking care that he never gets the impression that I need it or count on it at all seriously. By and by, as I said, opportunities will be much fewer, so that we are not running him into any danger; and having made his acquaintance will make an enormous difference to me, for I can rely on you to keep me posted up in his proceedings. And he might write himself sometimes; that could do no harm."

"The difficulty I foresee," said Mrs. Armitage, "is in keeping *him* posted up about *you*. As time goes on, he will want to know more and more about his antecedents. Even now he has occasionally asked awkward questions. I told him once that his father had seen him for the last time when he was a small infant, and he inferred from this that you were no longer in the land of the living."

"Am I, in point of fact?" Captain Delaney murmured half aside.

"But he'll be wishing for further particulars; and although I could no doubt discourage him from asking, I don't see how I'm to manage it without making him suspect that there is some discreditable mystery in the background, which would be a constant grief to him, and bad for him in every way. Do you know, the other day—it's only a minor matter, indeed, still, it shows the sort of thing I mean—he asked me for a photograph of his father; he has one of his mother, and I'm puzzled what to do about it. I can't give him one that he would recognize; but he'll think it odd, and odder by and by, if he's told that there aren't any in existence. You might as well say that a person had never had his hair cut, or bought a pair of boots, as that he had never been photographed."

"I think there are some among my things here," he said. "I'll look—I'll get Fahy to look them out, and probably you would find among them some old one that nobody could identify. But really, my dear Banatie, you must not trouble yourself with scruples about a little plausible fiction, when it seems the easiest way. Consider how often there is nothing more misleading than a fact. You may, with a clear conscience, set the Sapper's mind at rest by the assurance that both his parents are happily past their troubles; they are so, as far as he is concerned, thanks chiefly to you."

"That any thanks are due to me, especially from you, is just what I'm more than doubtful of," she said with dissatisfaction; "it seems to me that I may have done you a bad turn."

"You need have no such notion," he said. "I'd made up my mind not to keep the boy with me in any case. You see, I never did admire cuttle-fish; in fact, they're loathsome beings, and their propensity for enveloping themselves and their unlucky neighbours in an inky cloud is one of their least attractive features. So I resolved that I would not allow our relationship to be an excuse for bringing him up in gloomy surroundings. All that you have done is to make me quite happy about him, and to give me as many chances of consorting with him as I could take. The Maddens are an excellent good sort, and kindness itself. But they have philosophic minds, and the inevitable doesn't perturb them. What imagination they possess they put solidly into music; a capital investment, which saves a lot of speculative worry. I know, too, that they find my partnership in their household a convenience, which is another satisfactory point. On the whole, we may very safely continue to let well alone, bearing in mind that better is its worst enemy, as they say."

He spoke with the authority of one who has reflected long on some particular situation, and Mrs. Armitage felt a certain relief in allowing herself to be convinced.

"I daresay you are right," she said. "Anyhow, here comes Alfred, and it's time we set off while there's some twilight left. We have a small girl staying with us at present—little Hermione Helveran, the daughter of an old friend of mine. She's an orphan and lives with her mother's people in the West. One of her cousins there married the other day a cousin of your Maddens. Alfred tolerates her very kindly, and she's a quaint, quiet little

thing, with inherited musical gifts. I'll bring her down here the next time we come, for I think she might divert you. Though she's only a year younger than Alfred, he really would make two of her."

With this gratifying statement they parted, and went severally homewards, through darkness and twilight.

CHAPTER XI

A FEW days afterwards Mio was walking between Mrs. Armitage and Alfred up the grass-grown avenue of Drumatin House, with a feeling that she had set foot in a place which reminded her of home. Weeds and ruts and broken fences were accountable for this feeling, which grew stronger as they approached the house. It was a long, low, grey building, quite as much out of repair as Craiganogue, more so, indeed, for the wall at one end of it had been shored up with planks and fir-trunks. While they were passing the windows, Alfred told Mio that they belonged to the dining-room, which was full of oats.

"One year," he said, "there was a very heavy crop in a big field, and most of the outhouses in the yard there"—he pointed to a range of farm buildings—"are tumbling down, so Mr. Madden had the oats stored in the dining-room, that they never use. Miss Madden says it's a righteous retribution on him for such an uncouth proceeding that the walls and ceiling immediately began to crack. And she's always threatening to pitchfork every grain of it out on the lawn, because it brings rats indoors. I'd like to see her doing it, wouldn't you? She'd look funny at that sort of work. Oh, I forgot; you haven't seen her yet at all. I daresay we'll find her doing something queer."

They found Miss Madden tuning her grand piano, in the midst of a small chaos which she had created round the instrument. She had rolled up above her elbows the sleeves of her purple ulster, and was wearing very large felt slippers; otherwise her indoor attire and out remained identical.

"Now we have interrupted you," Mrs. Armitage said remorsefully, at the cessation of a sonorous drumming on the lowest F.

"Not a bit," Miss Madden said, quite unconcerned. "I've nearly finished, and I'll make a job of it. David and the Captain have fled to some uttermost ends, where you could follow them in the meantime, unless you would rather take a look at the Virginian creeper on the back of the dairy in the kitchen-garden. It's really gorgeous to behold, which they can't be said to be, and it will drop in pieces after a few storms and frosts. I'll come out as soon as I have done. Ah, there is the Sapper making off to join his friends; he's a fine child, but a proper appreciation of me is not included among his virtues, as I am well aware. And you will beat a retreat, too? And what will Miss Owl's-eyes do?" she said to Mio, who was gazing with awe at the largest musical instrument she had ever seen. "You'd like to get away while I'm making this ugly noise, I suppose?"

"I think I'd rather er—like to stay, please," Mio said, "if you will be playing a tune when you have finished, as Mick Moynihan used to after he had fixed up his fiddle."

From this answer sprang, by some caprice of fancy, the liking for little Mio Helveran, which was thenceforward to influence Clementina Madden in her dealings with the child. Mio, on the contrary, did not for some time yet join to her admiration of Miss Madden's playing anything beyond a polite tolerance of the performer. At first the

queer, weather-beaten figure, with wild hair, shabby old clothes, and the coarse large hands which produced most delicate music, impressed her so disagreeably that she was careful to keep out of sight of it while she listened. Gradually, however, as use and wont brought only pleasant associations, she began to regard the unshapely violet ulster, stained and faded, with the same sort of friendliness that she had felt towards the ugly battered covers of some delight-giving volume. Though she continued to wonder whether Miss Madden really possessed no other garment, she would probably have regretted any change; and before long she came to look in a wholly uncritical spirit on the aspect of a person who was invariably good-natured, and who made tunes on the piano almost more beautiful than "Silent O Moyle." Once she went so far as to rouse Alfred's indignation by declaring, not without a touch of perversity, that she thought Miss Madden sometimes looked quite pretty. He scouted the idea.

"She must be about a hundred. And if she ever did look pretty at all, it must have been ages and ages before you were born. You can't think such nonsense."

"I can think it quite well," said Mio. "It's when she's playing on the piano in the nearly-dark, and you can't see anything of her except her eyes just shining, when you're sitting in the corner of the window behind it."

"Oh, of course, if that's all," he said, "you might say old Mag, the black cat, was perfectly lovely, for her eyes are like round bullets of fire in the dark." This view of the matter relieved his mind, as he was glad to acquit Mio of what seemed to him extremely bad taste. His acquaintance with Miss Madden had begun, and was being again carried on, with rather more than a little aversion. Her music hardly appealed to him, and her

uncouth appearance, brusque manners, and slap-dash ways of doing things, were for him an experience which now on renewal had novelty's rough edges without any charm. All his instincts were orderly, and he had begun to turn an artist's eye upon his surroundings. Therefore, he avoided her society, and puzzled her slightly by the unintentional distance of his politeness.

This little discussion took place on the sandy strand, where the children were waiting for Captain Delaney to join them. It was towards noon on Holy Eve, and so brightly shone the sun, and so short were the shadows, that Mio, remembering, felt emboldened to mention how Mrs. Coyne, the cook and owner of old Mag, had said there would be plenty of ghosts coming back in the evening to look at the places they knew by the light of the moon.

"Do you think, Alfred, that we're likely to see any of them, if they are so plenty?" she anxiously inquired.

"I'd like to," said Alfred.

"To see *ghosts*?" Mio said, looking at him with dismay, and sidling a little further away from him as they sat on a low rock-ledge. There was no knowing what consequences might be incurred by so reprehensible a liking. "How could you like to see such things?"

"They aren't things exactly," said Alfred. "They're a sort of people. But I could ask them about things I want to know—where they come from, and all that."

"But everybody knows where they come from," Mio said. She looked round her fearfully, as if something might be lurking in the sunshine, and lest it should overhear, whispered: "Churchyards."

"Well now, that's very great nonsense, Mio," Alfred said severely. "It's just what housemaids and nursery-maids say."

"It's where the dead people are put," said Mio, "and

the wicked ones won't stay quietly in their graves, but get out, and walk about, terrifying live people in the dark. Mrs. Lee and Maria, and all of them used to tell me."

"And do you believe everything they tell you?" Alfred said, throwing so much scorn into the question that Mio took it up as a challenge.

"Not everything or half everything," she said. "And I don't believe the fairy-tale books and the Bible."

"Then you shouldn't believe that rubbish," said Alfred. "There never is anything put into graves except our machines that can't work any more. For when people die, I don't know where they go themselves, but they leave their bodies turned into things like machines that are worn out or broken up, and only fit to be put out of the way. So that's what churchyards are for, and they've nothing to do with ghosts, any more than old bicycles have."

"That's a good thing," Mio said, looking much relieved. "I won't mind what they say another time." Apparently, however, she had not altogether understood his statement, as she asked, after brief reflection, an earlier question of his own: "Is a violin a machine?"

"I suppose so," said Alfred; "a kind of one, anyhow."

"Well, then, when I die," said Mio, "I hope that I'll be turned into a violin. Perhaps I'd hear what was played on me, and that would be very pleasant."

They were interrupted here by a voice which startlingly close behind them said: "By the powers of smoke, sir, we have them surprised as nate as ninepence. I could be putting me cap on the two of them at once, like as if they were a couple of roosting chickens. Nobody need throuble themselves to say we'll be circumvented by them that lies in ambush."

This was Larry Fahy, who had conducted Captain Delaney across the sand so noiselessly that their approach had been covered by the children's conversation. Alfred vigorously repelled the charge of lying in ambush where he was in full view all the way down the beach; and he explained that they had not heard anybody coming, because they were talking about machines and ghosts. He then briefly sketched his theories on the subject, and asked Captain Delaney's opinion, reiterating his wish for an interview with a ghost. Captain Delaney agreed with him about the churchyards, but was inclined to think that ghostly meetings might better be deferred until both parties' machines were laid aside, the difficulties of doing without one in the world seeming so great. It must be hard to manage, Alfred admitted; and after some reflection, wondered whether it would be possible for a ghost to borrow another person's machine for a bit, when he wasn't using it much. At this suggestion Captain Delaney exulted for a moment, thinking to himself, "The little beggar has gone and excogitated the idea of possession and all that. He'll do great things one of these days." But before he had time to dwell on Alfred's coming distinctions as a psychologist and metaphysician, Valerie Marsigny arrived to carry off Mio, and when they had gone, Alfred at once set about propounding a plan which he had much at heart.

"I've been thinking, Captain," he said, as they took a turn up and down a firm sand strip in the sun, "that it would be a good thing, if you don't mind, of course, for me to adopt you."

Captain Delaney stood still as suddenly as if a bullet had skimmed with its gnat-note before his face. "What on earth put that notion into your head, Sapper?"

"I was thinking that you had nobody quite belonging to yourself," he said. "I hadn't either, and that was

why the Banatie adopted me, you know. It's a good thing, I think, to have a belonging; for if you've got none, there'll be only people minding about you on and off, and there won't any of them know what you're doing all the while, but only in bits. And some day they might all go away to different places, and leave you behind, because you're no affair of theirs. Don't you think, Captain, that it is better to have a belonging?"

"Well, yes, in some ways," Captain Delaney said with hesitation; "but that plan of yours—it would hardly do."

"I shouldn't want myself to be an affair of yours, you know, unless you liked," said Alfred. "What I do want is you to be an affair of mine. So I thought that to adopt you would be the best way. Then if the others did all go off, or anything, you wouldn't be left by yourself, because you'd have me, and that would be much handier. One night a little while ago I dreamt that there was nobody with you, and I set out walking to you; but the road had no end, and I walked and walked and walked—it was horrid. But, of course, it couldn't happen in reality, particularly if you and I were belongings."

Alfred expounded his views in complete unconsciousness that he was conjuring up a phantom-fear, which his hearer had believed himself, at no small cost, definitively to have banished. "I was a great ass ever to let it begin at all," Lambert Delaney reflected. "I ought to have stuck to what I intended at first, and have kept entirely out of his way. Now the only thing to be done is to make an end of it before anybody is much the worse; I hope it's not too late for that." And to Alfred he said:

"But you see, Sapper, you'll very soon be going away to school. You couldn't learn your business properly here, you know, and you mustn't bother your

head about anything else until you've got that done. It'll be all right, never fear. The Maddens and I are very good company, to say nothing of the 'cello, which you rather despise."

"Oh, but I don't," said Alfred; "or certainly I wouldn't."

"Besides that, it would be quite illegal," Captain Delaney continued solemnly, "for you to adopt anybody until you are twenty-one; and that's a long look-out—let me see—thirteen years nearly."

"Oh!" said Alfred.

They walked on for a little while in silence. Notwithstanding his long apprenticeship to patience, bitterly was Captain Delaney chagrined by his inability to see for himself whether his would-be guardian were seriously cast down at the failure of his plan. To fall back on the expedient of judging by the voice was, however, the course dictated without alternative.

"There'll be all sorts of things to do at school: cricket and football, and no end of new dodges to learn. You haven't done any chemistry yet; it's as queer and interesting as can be, only you'll have to mind what you're about when you come to experimenting."

Alfred's reply was sincerely cheerful in tone. "I'm sure it *will* be awfully jolly. And then in the holiday I can tell you all about it. And I could write, if you liked. I'll write as small as grown-up people, so that the sheets may hold more—until I can do the braille well enough."

"Why, of course you'll write," said Captain Delaney. "And so will I somehow."

"But the holidays will be much the best," said Alfred, "and there are a lot of holidays in thirteen years. I daresay I won't be going so very soon, for the Banatie has ordered some fireworks to have on the fifth of

November, and that isn't this week. Do you know, Captain, I don't think it matters about adopting; it won't really make any difference, because I can go on in my own mind just as if I belonged to you. Larry Fahy's always saying that he'll make it his business to do things, and I'll make it *my* business to do that. So it will be all the same."

It was Fate, Lambert Delaney thought at first helplessly as he listened. "No man can be more wise than Destiny;" he had attempted it in vain. But next moment he was reproaching himself with the folly which had brought his precautions to naught. "Out of this they must pack to-morrow, that's certain. I might have known how it would be, when I let her over-persuade me into doing what I had set my fool's face against. It was a temptation, of course, and then the way she put it made it infernally hard to refuse without seeming churlish and pig-headed. But that's a poor excuse for being lunatic enough to bring the child where he's very likely to get a sight of one of our dark cells that may be a dismal recollection to him all the days of his life. I believe I did give him a good grounding in geometry; certainly he picked it up uncommonly fast that way; and he's got a clear notion of those elements of trigonometry that often bother beginners; it may save him time and trouble later on. But Heaven knows, he might pay an awfully long price for any bits of things he learnt. I mustn't take any further part in his education, and that's a fact. . . . I hope to goodness that the Banatic *will* write often. She's only middling about telling one the things one wants to know; still, it's better than nothing at all."

The shadow of these meditations on his countenance was observed with uneasiness and regret by Alfred, who, casting about him for means of dispelling it, lit on a

query about a corollary to the ninth proposition of the Second Book of Euclid. There was always in Alfred's mind a large stock of matters which he wanted to have explained, and his experience had invariably been that the Captain seemed to meet his wishes with pleased alacrity. On this occasion, however, the result was not more than partially successful as a "begone dull care!" At the outset Alfred's attempt to draw a diagram was hindered by the Captain's accidental omission of a line important in constructing the figure; and when the source of the error was ascertained, he said so despondently: "Ah, yes, I'll soon have forgotten it all," that Alfred felt quite miserable. Then, endeavouring to console themselves both, he averred his conviction that the Captain would not have forgotten a bit of it, if he lived for a hundred years longer, and they were sitting together there on the strand, just the same way, doing mathematics. He had recognized the ineptness of this suggestion immediately, even before the Captain had said: "Oh, Lord!" But none better occurred to him; and, on the whole, things had gone wrong, as they so easily do, even when two people are not short of a pair of eyes. Mrs. Armitage noticed at luncheon that Alfred seemed rather out of spirits.

Their exodus from Letterbrack was not altogether as abrupt as Captain Delaney had at first been disposed to decree. He modified his views on that point during a conversation with Mrs. Armitage, by which he brought her to share, or at least act upon, his way of thinking.

"You must admit," he urged her, "that it's not natural for a small boy to find his *summum bonum* in sitting half the day with a blind man, and working at mathematics from clumsy instructions. But find it he does at present, and the thing mustn't go on."

"He might easily light on worse *summums bonums*,"

Mrs. Armitage said with inelegant latinity. "However, I see that it will be better to take him away." So it was arranged that Mrs. Armitage should with as little delay as might be, take up her abode close to a super-excellent preparatory school at Cheltenham; and that the Christmas holidays should be spent abroad, probably in the South of France, where both climate and language were attractions. Letterbrack would see the Armitages no more, for Captain Delaney's self-renouncing ordinance was to be a thorough-going one. These plans for his future were not more than partially revealed to Alfred, who might, if he had but known, have reproached his elders with being "imperfect speakers," when they talked of his absence from Letterbrack as if it were a limited period, and gave no hint, although he showed clearly that he was counting on a speedy return. Still, communicativeness on their part would not have made him by any means happier. As it was, his coming days wore an agreeable aspect of novelty that could not fail to interest; and if at the end of his forecasts his mind did always revert restfully to a nook on the sun-warmed strand, or the Captain's own corner in the Drumatin House library, why, that point would probably go gliding on ahead of him, until it gradually receded into vagueness, and was no longer regarded as a goal.

Whereas the Armitages' sojourn at Letterbrack was thus cut unexpectedly short, little Mio Helveran's stay there much exceeded the limits originally proposed for it. In the midst of Mrs. Armitage's preparations she received a distracted letter from Mrs. Quin. Her youngest boy Gerald had developed scarlatina, she hoped and trusted in a mild form, as he was anything but strong; however, one kind seemed to be as infectious as the other. She feared that Carrie was sickening for it, too, complaining of a sore throat and cold shivers,

which looked uncommonly like it. Indeed, it would most likely go through the whole house. So what on earth she was to do about Mio's coming back she did not know. The Hill-Clarks were still on their wedding tour, or she might have asked Vi to take in the child, though it would be a long way to send her by herself, and Mrs. Fenlow was away paying visits in Scotland; they didn't even know her address, and it would be no use in any case. And Miss Brannock, of course, was gone.

Confronted by all these difficulties, Mrs. Armitage at first saw nothing for it except to take little Mio with them, although at some inconvenience; but a different solution offered itself from an unlooked-for quarter. Making a farewell call on the Maddens, she happened to mention the subject, when to her surprise Miss Madden said with unmistakable alacrity, as if jumping at a chance: "Let her come here." In the circumstances it really seemed the best possible arrangement, notwithstanding that there was a certain amount of unsuitability about it. The addition of Mio to the Drumatin household in some degree resembled the sticking of a small, daintily-bound volume of children's fairy-stories into a shelf which turned only dingy brown leather backs on a rather dull and dusty world. But her heterogeneousness proved to be, in fact, no serious disadvantage; perhaps none at all. It was not, indeed, of an obtrusive or disturbing kind, and could easily have passed unnoticed, had her neighbours chosen to ignore her presence among them, as they did not choose. David Madden forthwith set about spoiling her flagrantly, and would not admit that the practice was in any way reprehensible. When taxed with it once by his sister, he avowed his intention of continuing it.

"If you want me to keep a small wild bird at arm's

length," he said, "you shouldn't bring it to hop about where I am. For the nearer I can entice it to come, the more stuck up I feel myself, and that's a fact."

"Even so," Miss Madden objected, "it can't be necessary for you to have the whole place strewn all over with crumbs."

There were some grounds for her protest, as at that moment of the darkening November afternoon the vicinity of the library fire was wildly littered with large sheets of music-paper, on which he had written out in big, slowly-drying ink blobs an easy arrangement of "Pestel" with variations, for the furtherance of Mio's musical studies.

"Don't blot them on me for your life" he said in an agonized tone, as his sister approached the hearth-rug; "those ones are quite wet still—there! your skirt was all but over them."

"Oh, I'll take care," Miss Madden said with resigned impatience. "I just want to put this little saucepan on the fire for a minute, and boil some milk."

"What on earth for," said her brother, "at this hour of the day?"

"I'm going to make a small cup of chocolate for Mio," said Miss Madden; "she didn't seem to be hungry at luncheon, and hardly touched her rice-pudding."

"I suppose *it* was spoiled," David said sarcastically, and with a triumphant chuckle, which was echoed from Lambert Delaney's corner.

"You're a mean creature, Lambert Delaney," she said, turning towards it, "to sit there making a mock of me, when I've got nobody else to back me up. I have two minds not to put in another stick as I had intended for a cup for you this dismal chilly day." But she did not take that threatened vengeance.

An accident nearly befell Mio's cup on its way upstairs

to her own room, where she was writing a letter to her cousin Carrie. For Miss Madden caught her foot in something, and, stumbling, very narrowly averted an irremediable disaster to what she had in her hand. On investigation she found that a gathered flounce at the bottom of her long-suffering black alpaca skirt had at one point become ripped, and hung in an ensnaring loop. Her method of dealing with it was simple and summary. Grasping it firmly, she tore it off all round the edge, to harsh sounds of rent material and broken threads, and then rolling up the endlessly trailing yards, threw the black ball into the fire. Mio looked on rather aghast from over her frothy cup and sugary biscuits.

"Well, now, it's a mystery to me," Miss Madden said reflectively, as she watched this discarded ornament turning to ashes among the red turf-sods, "what possesses any rational beings to tack such things on to their clothes, which are nuisance enough without them in all conscience. It can hardly be that they want more chances of breaking their necks. I was within an ace of coming down that time."

"Perhaps they think it looks nicer than just plain," Mio suggested, "and if they didn't have their frocks so *much* longer than this one of mine, they couldn't put their foot in it, even when it got unripped."

"If they would but believe it, the less there is to look at about them the better, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred," said Miss Madden; "that's to say, my dear, when they come to be old hags. As long as they are like you, of course, they must wear their pretty frocks and all that."

"I suppose they might burn up a piece, if it was torn off," said Mio, who considered the expedient a sensible one, calculated to avert scoldings and reproachful repairs. But to her disappointment Miss Madden pronounced

against young persons taking upon themselves to cremate any articles of attire until they had arrived at years of discretion. "When you are as old as I am, you know, you can please yourself—or at least try—about frills and furbelows; but meanwhile you mustn't take me for a model, little Owl's-eyes, by any manner of means. It's a privilege of the venerable to wear ugly old overalls—blessed for ever be he who invented them," Miss Madden said, pulling down the sleeves of her shabby ulster. "You can wear *anything* under them, and always look perfectly respectable. But you'd be a funny little figure; no, indeed, you'll have to bide your time."

That Mio should not rough it in any way while domiciled at Drumatin House was a matter about which Miss Madden concerned herself with real seriousness. So far did she carry her solicitude, that she used to toil upstairs with the big kitchen-kettle filled for the child's bath, lest the housemaid should supply her with hard water to the detriment of her delicate pink and white. "The pump is three steps nearer the scullery door than the soft-water cistern," Miss Madden argued, "and three steps are further than I'd trust Kitty McNulty any day of the year."

Altogether it need not be wondered at that Mio found herself well off in her new quarters, much made of, and amply supplied with what most interested her indoors, music and books, while in the precincts of the sea she had an inexhaustible storehouse of treasures, marvellous and various. Yet at times her thoughts went back wistfully to Craiganogue, though less on account of anything enjoyable remembered there than of misfortunes which she apprehended to be now existing among its inhabitants. She was gravely concerned about the reported illness of Gerald and Carrie, especially Carrie, and deeply regretted her inability to prove her sympathy or do any-

thing to please them. Then it occurred to her that she might write as Carrie had done, and, like her, send something in the letter. It would surely be possible to find a small gift that would not stick in the slit of the pillar-box at the gate. With this object in view, she went down that very morning to the beach, where she luckily lighted on a wonderful little rock-pool, in which were dispread quite an elfin forest of seaweeds, lacy and coloured, with every shade of red and russet, green and pink and lilac. When a handful of them were fished out of the clear water, they lost some of their floating beauty, but still had a charm. Kitty McNulty, to whom Mio showed them, expressed great admiration, and said: "Sure, I knew a lady one time did be prodding them out with a pin on sheets of white paper in a sort of pattron like. Fiddling over them she often was half the day, and setting great store by them entirely." In that case, Mio thought, these would certainly amuse Carrie, who must be very tired of staying indoors, where she always said she had nothing to do. So next day, after they had dried themselves on the window-stool until they were only a little dampish, Mio wrote a letter to Carrie, and folded up in it a present which she had sought out from among her stores. Round the letter she then wrapped the stiffening, filmy sprays, and she was thus engaged, when, as has been reported, the arrival of a cup of chocolate interrupted her. She was glad to have the chance of asking Miss Madden to address the envelope, a task that had loomed formidably, with "Craiganogue" as a most crucial test of spelling and penmanship.

On taking up the envelope Miss Madden said: "Uchgh," for fragrance is not a virtue found in seaweed.

"It doesn't smell nice, I know, if you look at it very close," Mio said rather anxiously; "but I don't think Carrie will mind, and she can throw it away if she does."

"Oh, I daresay she won't," Miss Madden said. "But what is the hard thing you have put in the middle?"

"Diamonds," Mio said triumphantly; "fine big ones."

"The child must have picked up some clear-looking little pebble-stones on the shore," Miss Madden thought; "however, they'll probably please the other little girl just as well as the real thing." And aloud she said: "That's grand!"

But Carrie Quin, on opening the envelope in her bedroom at Craiganogue, first uttered what sounded like a prolongation of Miss Madden's "Uchgh!" and then extracted from the crumpled sheet of note-paper a circlet of ray-darting brilliants. Mio had written: "The seaweed is to stik on white paiper, and the broshe is to be your own now, and not mine, so you can lend it. It is a pressent like the Pig, and I hope you will be well again sum day, and Gareld to."

The diamond brooch had been in Carrie's possession for many months by the time that she and its former owner met again, so unexpectedly did Mio's visit to Letterbrack lengthen out. There were difficulties in the way of her return to Craiganogue, and none whatever about her remaining at Drumatin House. After the excitement of her eldest daughter's wedding, and the worry of the children's illness, Mrs. Quin's health really broke down, so that she could hardly cope with her household cares. She was the more helpless because she had seized the opportunity of Miss Brannock's absence on a holiday to inform her by letter that her services were no longer required. This statement was forthwith belied by harassing circumstances, and Mrs. Quin, at a loss for the successor, whom she could not easily procure, thankfully accepted Miss Madden's offer to keep little Mio until she could be quite conveniently received at

Craiganogue. Though that time did not perhaps ever actually come, her Uncle Charlie, considering it inexpedient that she should take up her abode wholly with the Maddens, made a point of having her brought back after about a year had passed. But she left them on the understanding that she was not to be long away.

CHAPTER XII

THINGS at Craiganogue seemed to Mio not much changed after her year's absence. If she had considered them under that aspect, the difference which would have struck her most might have been the increased crossness of several among the house's inmates. This impression would have been, no doubt, partly due to her own recent experiences of spoiling, but there were real grounds for such a one. Her Aunt Ethel, with physical machinery out of gear, and burdensome anxieties piling themselves up, economized her overtaxed energy by the adoption of a glum curtness in her demeanour towards everybody who was not an especial favourite; an expedient which, discouraging unnecessary intercourse, tended to avert friction, though at the sacrifice of social amenities. Mio kept out of her company. It was not in the natural disposition of Charlie Quin to be continuously morose, but he had become in those days unusually subject to fits of moodiness and irritability, so that people said you couldn't tell where you'd find him. Mio avoided him also, to the extent of not approaching him, albeit she refrained from slipping away if he came into her vicinity. As heretofore, Jack and Flossie were still the good-tempered ones of the family; but their paths did not often fall in with Mio's. Domestic pursuits chiefly occupied Flossie, she being to the manner

born, and early promoted to housekeeping by her mother's breakdown; and Jack was generally out of doors, too far afield for his small cousin's rambling capability.

In the places of Vi and Fred there were just gaps; and yet not altogether so, for the influence of, at any rate, the absent Fred made itself felt in the household. It was not an harmonious one, a fact for which other people were in part more to blame than he. Dissatisfaction, indeed, was naturally enough caused by the disappointing reports of his progress in his studies. This he made not more rapidly than might have been expected from his habit of spending liberally on what he called "larking around" the time which he should have devoted to them, and a considerable fraction of the remainder on forecasting the future martial glories of Fred Quin. But then no small proportion of his father's chagrin at these untoward proceedings arose from his uneasy remembrance of how he had acquired the funds wherewith to provide the expensive grinding by which the young ass seemed likely to profit not at all. What censorious persons might choose to describe as the misapplication of trust money was, he admitted to himself, a step which somehow required for its complete justification that it should bring about some signal and brilliant success, and now nothing of the kind appeared likely to occur. On the contrary, it looked as if it was going to turn out no better than those infernal Nitrates shares, which might have gone a long way towards retrieving the situation, if they had not hopelessly slumped with a suddenness nobody could have foreseen. Hence, Fred was not entirely accountable for the bitter spirit in which his father coupled him with that other bad investment. Even less could he be held responsible in the matter of the ill-humours displayed by his youngest brother Gerald, who for some time past had constituted himself a portion of his partial

mother's daily harassments. Gerald was by nature jealous and imitative, and the fulfilment of Fred's wishes had stirred up in him both these qualities. He thought it behoved him also to desire a military career, and having persuaded himself that he did, he could not see why he should not go to lodgings in Dublin and have a grinder just as well as Fred. These views he urged upon his mother with native obstinacy, from the vantage ground of his position as pet, and was mightily aggrieved because in the face of obvious impossibilities she dared not offer him the immediate encouragement which he demanded. He scoffed at her temporizing plea that thirteen was too young, and raged at the suggestion of any alternative pursuit. His mother deemed it her duty to tell him that he should not be so unreasonable, but in her heart she blamed his father for giving in to Fred's nonsense ; no wonder it made the poor child discontented. The poor child did, at any rate, in his discontent so grumble and whine, that he fully maintained his character as one of the household crosspatches. Carrie, who was likewise quite living up to her reputation, had also at this time a grievance of her own ; namely, that no resident governess had been provided for her. Instead of this, Miss Stack, the Protestant National School mistress, came up for a couple of hours in the afternoon. And Rose O'Callaghan, the parlour-maid, said she had never in her life heard of a family where a resident governess was not kept, when there were growing-up young ladies. And as for Miss Stack, she was nothing on earth except old Briney Coleman's grand-daughter, that kept the little public at Longhally cross-roads many a long year. The eldest of the Colemans took and married a son of Tom Stack, that was land-steward to Sir Digby Ryeford, and that was the beginning of all the grandeur she ever had. And turned a black Protestant to get him. " But

this Minnie Stack that's cocked up here by way of teaching you, Miss Carrie, it's attending the mixed school at Kildee she used to be along with me own sisters; and her father just a working gardener." Nor had Rose ever heard of the likes of her having tea brought to her in the school-room. And Rose was scarcely thinking she'd care to be stopping in a place where she was expected to wash up after one of the Stacks. It was only natural, of course, that Carrie should feel profoundly dissatisfied with a person so inferior for a preceptress.

"The last time Aunt Mabel was here, I heard her and mother talking about it," she reported to Mio, "and they said this young woman—that's Miss Stack—would do well enough till you wanted someone better, and then I could be finished off too. As if I didn't matter any more than some sort of old pig."

They were in the schoolroom writing copies, a branch of education on which Miss Stack laid much stress, as it produced visible results with small trouble to herself. On the present occasion Carrie's copy was "Knowledge is a pearl of great price," and her preoccupied thoughts led her on one line to substitute "pig" for "pearl." When she saw the blunder, she said: "Oh, bother; never mind. I daresay she'll never remark it, for she hardly looks at them at all. Anyhow, it's ridiculous for me to be writing copies, and I just twelve. How do you keep your fingers out of the ink? I always get all over it. But I suppose she doesn't really know how to teach anything except common writing."

"Can she play on the piano?" inquired Mio.

"Not she. She plays hymns on the old harmonium in the school-house. We sometimes hear them all squalling like hens inside there when we're going past."

"I don't want to learn any hymns," said Mio. "Maybe

you'll like the tunes Mr. Madden says I am to play every day after I have practised the exercises."

But Carrie replied: "Oof! do you go on with that still? I should think you might have got tired by this time of scraping on a squeaky fiddle like old Mick Moynihan." Which made Mio feel rather forlornly lonesome, and wonder whether in the library at Drumatin House Captain Delaney was playing Handel's "Largo" on his 'cello to the soft chime of the big piano's accompaniment. A few days afterwards she did meet with a more sympathetic and appreciative hearer, but, as it happened, in a saddening sort of way.

Latish one evening Lizzie, the housemaid, put her head in at the schoolroom door, and said that Mick Moynihan was below. He had stepped over to bid Kate Hely good-bye, because he was going home to Bantry for good and all this time, so he wouldn't be coming back again. And he was asking after Miss Mio.

Down to the kitchen thereupon ran Mio with her violin, which Mick had never yet seen or heard. He examined it, profuse in admiring expressions, which he uttered with enthusiasm. But when she had played two or three tunes, to which he listened from his usual position, propped up against the big wooden turf-box, and half sitting on a ledge projected by the adjacent wall, he kept silence so long that the maids, fearing lest Miss Mio should be mortified, abandoned ecstatic comments among themselves for direct appeals to him: "Well now, Mick, isn't that something you might call fiddling?" "It's a wonder to me how she contrives so ilegant, with her little fingers scarce a size to get a good grip of the handle of it at all." "You don't very often hear the like of that, Mick, I'll go bail, with all the travelling you have about the country?" At last he spoke:

"Indeed, and bedad, Miss Mio, consaiting in me own

mind I did be that it was meself had you finely instruthed in the fiddling. A great offer you made at it entirely last year. But past and beyond me you're gone now, whoever it was had the taiching of you, on that grand little instrhument of yours, Miss Mio. There'll be no more talk with you of meself and me ould fiddle."

A regretfulness in Mick's tone made Mio feel suddenly as if she had been guilty of an ingratitude with which she was far from enduring to reproach herself. "Oh, but I'll be always talking of you and the fiddle," she said. "Why, you know, I never could think how people got any sort of noise out of it except horrible screeches, until you showed me the way. And if I hadn't learnt that, what would have made Uncle Charlie get me the violin?"

"Ah, sure, perhaps that might be the way it was, Miss Mio," said Mick, not apparently consoled; "but, anyhow, you wouldn't look at a common ould fiddle these times at all, let alone playing on it."

"It isn't common, Mick," Mio protested, "not a bit; it's just as good as anything else. I'll tell you, Mick, I think my violin's a little better, maybe, for playing on if people only want to listen to tunes; but your fiddle is ever so much the best when they're wanting to dance, the way Lizzie and Norah Murphy did in the shed one wet day, do you remember? And it would be very nice if you and I could learn to play a duet—that's when two people play a tune at the same time, as Mr. Madden at Letterbrack does on his violin and Captain Delaney on his big 'cello. They're beautiful. Maybe the next evening you come over we could learn to play one together, you on the fiddle and I on the violin."

"I'll never be in it again after this night, Miss Mio, me honey," said Mick. "Stopping at home with me sister is what I'll be doing the rest of me days. Since

me accident it's too much the lame leg does be coming agin me for going backwards and forwards."

"After getting a bad fall on the road last month the crathur is, Miss Mio," explained Kate Hely. "He had a right to quit stravading around before he breaks his neck, and that's a solemn fact, as often I told him."

"So now I'll be stepping along with meself in the name of God," Mick said, twisting himself to his feet. "And good luck to you, Miss Mio, with the grand little fiddle. It's more than you or I can tell, where the two of us may happen to be playing our tunes one of these fine days."

This vague prospect did not conceal from Mio that Mick Moynihan's departure thus unreturningly was a melancholy event. A livelier one occurred that same evening in the arrival on a visit of her cousin Mrs. Hill-Clarke. It did not, however, promote concord in the establishment. Vi had hardly been at any time, and was now less than formerly, an inmate likely to do so. After a year of matrimony the extreme self-importance, which had been developed in her by her sudden elevation to the dignities of a married woman, continued undiminished; but much of the first glamour, worn off by use and wont, many of the early "imaginings as we would," rebuffed by encounters with things as they are, had gone their way, and taken with them part of the elated complacency that had helped to keep her in a good humour. Therefore, she was now revisiting Craiganogue to some extent in the character of a person of consequence, who, feeling that her claims to distinguished privileges have not been fully recognized by the world in general, is the less tolerant of such shortcomings in particular individuals. Her husband at this time had been so found wanting, and was, in fact, the reprehensible cause of her visit. For he had gone off to a shooting-party in Donegal, the

invitation to which should, she considered, have included her, and not doing so, should have been declined. Her aggrieved mood accordingly made her touchy and exacting, and was to grounds for taking offence what a sugary stickiness is to the resort of flies.

These things are worth mentioning here, as they brought about between her and her sister Carrie a quarrel, the results of which lasted long and extended far. Its proximate cause was trivial enough, and apparently remote from any serious outcome. On the schoolroom chimney-piece there had stood for six or seven years a china match-holder, in shape a hollow tree-trunk, bearing an inscription, realistically rudely wrought: "With Best Wishes." Carrie, the owner of it, prized it much, as a birthday gift from her former governess, Miss Farrell, whose memory she cherished, in the opinion of her family chiefly out of contrariness. Vi, one morning soon after her arrival, accidentally swept this ornament off its place, to a shattered destruction in the fender, by an incautious brushing past of her voluminous blouse-sleeve.

"Goodness gracious! What have I knocked down?" said Vi. Then, picking up a fragment large enough for purposes of identification: "Oh, it's only that hideous old match-holder. It's no loss, I'm sure, so there's no great harm done."

At this uprose in wrath Carrie's voice shrill from an opposite corner.

"Oh, yes, it's all very fine for you to come clumping in here and smash up other people's things. I wonder how you'd like it yourself if somebody destroyed anything of yours that way?"

"If I had any such ugly rubbish," Vi said, laughing, "I'm sure I'd be glad and thankful to get rid of it."

"Then I wish to goodness you'd go back to your own

rubbishy place," said Carrie, "and keep out of cart-horsing about where you're not wanted."

"Be quiet, miss, and don't let me hear you speaking in such a way to your sister again," said their mother.

"Good gracious! who do you suppose would mind what the little donkey gabbles?" Vi said with dignified disdain. "I'm going now to get Flossie to put a stitch in my glove-buttons, for this evening, you know. The shop people always sew them on so badly; they come off in no time."

"Maybe you'll mind fast enough before very long, you great clumsy lump!" Carrie called after her furiously, as she left the room. And this veiled threat, received by Vi with a contemptuous giggle, seemingly terminated the incident.

The entertainment to which Vi had alluded was a musical evening at the neighbouring Hutchinsons. For several reasons she regarded it as a rather great event. It would be almost her first appearance in the society of her neighbourhood, and she thoroughly liked the prospect of bursting out on it in a sudden blaze as Mrs. Gilbert Hill-Clarke, at an age when in the ordinary course of things she would have just come out, with no brilliancy at all, as merely the Quins' eldest girl. She expected to meet there also, for the first time since her childhood, some distant and wealthy cousins, who in the old days had assumed a high and mighty demeanour, but who had since her marriage shown symptoms of an inclination to make themselves more agreeable. These people Vi had proudly resolved that she would surprise not a little through her manner, conversation and attire, with evidence of how every bit she was as good as they were, and how completely above being looked down upon, or condescended to, by any of them. But, after all, the first time to which she looked forward with most enjoyment

was connected with a very splendid blouse, which she had never yet worn, though it had long been in her possession. Youthful Mrs. Hill-Clarke's taste for dress had certainly grown with her suddenly acquired means of indulging it. Indeed, a tendency to outgrow those means had already appeared, and had occasioned a few domestic differences at Mount Vale. Still, it was on the whole a taste simple and unsophisticated. She had never associated with anybody who was really fashionable and extravagant, nor had she the least inkling of the superb scorn which would have been roused in such a person by the idea that she supposed herself to have pretensions of the kind. If a costume or a hat seemed to her pretty and sufficiently like what she saw on fashion plates, it satisfied all her requirements. Only quite of late had she even begun to call things chic. So now she was childishly capable of looking forward with pleased excitement to the putting on of a pink satin blouse, which had lain for more than twelve months, in its careful folds of tissue paper, beneath a cardboard lid.

The keeping of it there had involved the exercise on her part of some prudential self-restraint. She explained her action to her mother and sister, while Flossie was tightening the wobbly glove-buttons.

"You see, it's the last of my wedding things that I haven't worn at all, and the one I liked best of all the blouses. I made up my mind that I *would* keep one of them as a reserve in case of emergencies, for, of course, I knew it could get no harm packed up in its box, and those dressy evening blouses don't go out of fashion. So it has hardly been out of its papers since it came from the shop. I was sure that if I ever did look at it, I couldn't resist putting it on, it's such a heavenly pink, and such a ducky little chemisette; Valenciennes lace. And now, you see, I was very wise, for only for it, here

I'd be this minute without a stitch in the shape of a body for the Hutchinsons. But, as it is, it will go beautifully with my *cramoisi velours épinglé* skirt. You couldn't have a better contrast than the dark, dark red and that pale-blush-rose shade. It's a trained skirt."

"I'm sure it ought to look lovely, my dear," said Mrs. Quin, "and you could wear your pink coral-set."

"I don't care very much about coral," said Vi. "I've set my heart on making Gilbert get me a little pearl necklace or collarette. A necklace would suit me best, I think, as my neck is plump and not too long. I saw somewhere or other that pearls are rather cheap just now. So one of these days I'll take him when he's in the humour and get it out of him. He likes girlish-looking things for me, and there's nothing more girlish than pearls. Oh, I'll manage him easily enough, no fear," she concluded with airy complacency.

But before a round of the clock was finished, came to a sudden end all her satisfaction. It was between eight and nine on that evening, and Vi had gone up to her room to begin dressing for her party. A few minutes afterwards her door was violently thrown open, and her voice, loud and peremptory with agitation, called: "Mother! Flossie!" Both sped precipitately upstairs at the summons, to find Vi standing in her doorway, with the pink satin blouse gathered up recklessly in her arms, and her flushed face full of consternation.

"Oh," she said, "just look at this! And what on earth am I to do?" Turning, she flung the blouse down on the bed, and her misfortune was at once manifest. On the front of the blouse a huge ink-blot, spread over the shimmering pink satin and delicate white lace, stood out in startling blackness. Furthermore, it had soaked through to the back, where a corresponding patch glared at the beholder. Sundry smaller splatterings added

completeness to the ruin. A stream of ink had apparently been poured into the box from some little height through a crevice in the paper folds, which had concealed from anybody merely glancing under the lid that dire destruction had gone on darkly below them.

Mrs. Quin and Flossie stood amazed. "How in the world did it happen?" said Mrs. Quin. "You weren't doing anything with ink?"

"It didn't happen—I was doing nothing to anything at all," Vi declared incoherently. "Even the cord wasn't unfastened off it till just this minute ago."

"Who *can* have done it?" said Mrs. Quin.

"It's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of in my life," said Flossie, and they both relapsed into unconjecturing amazement.

But Vi's mind was working more rapidly under the stimulus of a nearer interest in the disaster, and a disposition which always led her in quest of somebody to blame for untoward events. "I'll tell you who it was, then," she said, "it was that nasty little toad, Carrie."

"Oh, good gracious, Vi!" her mother said, shocked. "Carrie? What would make the child do such a thing?"

"Spite," said Vi. "She's been scowling at me like a fiend the whole day, ever since I knocked down her trashy old china thing. So that's why she's gone and destroyed my beautiful blouse. Four guineas it was; there's the price label on it still. I remember now she bawled after us when we were going out of the school-room that she would do something of the sort; and I did hear the little wretch stumping upstairs while Flossie was sewing on my buttons in the bookroom. You may depend upon it, that was what she was at. It's just like her."

"I really wouldn't have believed it of her," said Mrs. Quin.

"You *may* believe it, then," Vi averred with increasing confidence. "And don't you remember at luncheon her fingers were black with ink? You yourself said that she ought to be ashamed of the state she had her cuffs in with ink stains."

"Carrie always *is* all over ink," observed Flossie.

"Besides that, there was nobody else to do it," Vi continued. "I noticed when I was untying them that the knots on the cord looked as if they had been meddled with; and I thought the housemaid had been prying at it, till I saw the way it was. She wouldn't have had any ink, if it had been her."

"It's quite dry—as dry as a bone," Flossie said, scrutinizing the stain.

"Of course it is," said Vi. "That sort of blue-black stuff dries in a few minutes, and she must have done it hours and hours ago. It was only about ten o'clock."

"There—I hear her outside in the passage, going to bed," said Mrs. Quin. "We'd better call her in and ask her about it. Carrie, come here; I want to speak to you."

Carrie's demeanour on entering told against her, being triumphantly defiant. The truth was that she actually had that morning committed in her sister's bedroom a deed of vengeance, though on a vastly smaller scale than the enormity of which she had fallen under suspicion. She had, in fact, arranged the pins belonging to the green plush pin-cushion on the dressing-table so that they formed the words: *Fat fool*. With this insult she now expected to be taxed, and she was fully prepared to brazen it out, deriving positive enjoyment from the situation. The misapprehension was prolonged by Vi's haste to accuse and vituperate.

"A nice thing you've done with your odious spite," she began, before anybody else could speak.

And Carrie pertly replied : " I'm glad you like it."

The effrontery of this seeming admission took away her hearers' breath for a moment, after which they burst into reproaches and threats of penalties to come. But when Carrie at length became aware of the charge that was really being brought against her, she, in her turn, waxed furious, and stormily denied any knowledge of what had happened to Vi's blouse, or, she added, any other of her old clothes. Yet in the face of the exasperation which she had caused at the outset by her words and manner, all her vehemence now failed to convince anybody that she was innocent.

" You see, she knew all about it before any of us told her," said Vi. " She's just got frightened now, that's all." And Carrie was too much excited to explain her first mistake, even if the rest had been in a mood for listening. An interchange of recriminations, angry and angrier, followed, until finally Mrs. Quin, alarmed at Vi's increasingly hysterical symptoms, summarily hustled Carrie out of the room, with a menacing promise that the matter should be more thoroughly investigated on the morrow. She then set herself to soothe and console the owner of the ruined blouse, but with scant success. Nothing else would Vi hear of wearing ; the Hutchinsons' party was utterly impossible for her ; the others could go or not, just as they pleased, and make any sort of excuses at all. Perhaps they might like to take that charming creature *Carrie* with them instead. With that she banged and bolted her door against any further suggestions, and the evening closed at Craiganogue amid general uncasiness and gloom.

Next morning the case against Carrie looked even blacker than it had done overnight. For in the meanwhile the outrage of the inscribed pin-cushion had been discovered, stirring up fresh wrath, and giving additional

proof of her malevolence. But this aspect of affairs was changed by the appearance at breakfast of Mio, who had been asleep in bed during the fray. On hearing the story of the inky blouse, she said :

"Why, that must be the one—I know it was pink—that had the ink so nearly spilt over it in the schoolroom, the time when Gerald tried to write bank-notes on a bit of the thin, crackly paper. It was ever so long ago," she went on to explain, "before Vi was married. The box was left on the sofa with the lid slanting half off it. So the big ink-bottle began slipping down, before they could stop it, and was just going to upset itself all over everything, only it fell on the floor first. Miss Brannock said she had never got such a fright in her life, but there was no great harm done. Perhaps some ink did splash into the box, while the bottle was slithering off ; it easily might without Miss Brannock seeing it, for she had only just come in at the door. It was too bad, and the bank-notes were all nonsense."

"Now that I think of it," said Mrs. Quin, "one of the paper sheets has been torn in two."

Further queries, judiciously worded so as to be unalarming, produced corroborative evidence from the forger Gerald, and thus it was reasonable to regard Carrie's character as cleared. But although their mother was happy to shift the blame from her own children to the absent ex-governess, Vi did not pretend to be by any means best pleased at this loss of a scapegoat. She could not bring herself to make Carrie any apology for wrongful suspicions, and they remained on the least amicable terms. Towards the end of her visit she did, indeed, leave as a peace-offering a box of chocolate-creams on Carrie's chest of drawers, only to find it shortly afterwards deposited on her own. As Vi had a thrifty mind, and was fond of sweets, she thought to

console herself for the rebuff by personally consuming the contents of the rejected box. When, however, she removed its highly-glazed flower-wreathed lid, there emerged a forbidding odour, and closer observation showed that a sprinkling of paraffin oil had left nothing edible within.

Carrie, when first the idea of this pleasant device occurred to her, confided it to Mio, who strongly dissuaded her from carrying it out. Mio's argument ran: "You see, Carrie, if you won't take the box, you shouldn't do anything to it at all, because it isn't yours. I suppose it belongs to Vi, and you've no business to spoil her chocolates."

"People often do things they've no business to," Carrie replied to this.

"*Piggy* people," Mio said, with a little lift up of her chin, as she sat in a window of the schoolroom, with her small dark head very blackly outlined against a pale drab November sky. Something disdainful in her look made Carrie suddenly feel out of conceit with the plan which she had thought so clever; perhaps she went so far as positively to despise it. But presently Mio slipped away, and what Carrie called Vi's ugly quack sounded on the stairs, and there was the paraffin ready in a jam pot, begged from the store which Kate kept surreptitiously for lighting fires. And the upshot was that Carrie, forgetting her cousin's counsels, took her own way, following the line of least resistance to its little mean end.

CHAPTER XIII

DURING the next half-dozen years or so Mio measured her time less by the seasons' succession than by her changes of abode from Craiganogue to Letterbrack and back again. She made repeated journeys between the two places, generally alone, but more than once accompanied by Carrie. This was because Miss Madden found some difficulty in reconciling the gratification of her wish for Mio's society with a fear that the child would miss companions of suitable age. The scruple was really not needed, as she owed to herself once on hearing Mio remark that somehow it always seemed as if she went back to Craiganogue much oftener than she did to Drumatin House. Even apart from the inferences which might be drawn from that illusion of Mio's, it was antecedently probable enough, all things considered, that the world would come more congenially to her with the Maddens than with the Quins. For at Drumatin House, not only was she made much of herself, but much was made of what interested and delighted her most—music, and books, and the strangeness of things. At Craiganogue, on the contrary, it appeared to her that people were continually fussing, and frequently scolding and squabbling about stupid rubbish, that in her opinion, intolerantly inexperienced, nobody with any sense could suppose to matter a farthing. Somehow, while she was

there she seemed almost always to be wishing that she could get away from everybody into a corner by herself, unless, indeed, she had already got into one, which she seldom let slip a chance of doing. When she did voluntarily remain outside, it generally was to please somebody else; but there were few people who ever particularly wanted her. Carrie or Gerald might come and grumble to her, or her Aunt Ethel might send her to the kitchen on a message, the purport of which not uncommonly was that there must not be such a disgraceful noise in the house-yard. Sometimes Jack would invite her to accompany him on a walk, and she went with pleasure, especially if Prim, the shaggy small terrier, was, and if no startling firearms were of the party. Still, on the whole, she was little in request.

At Drumatin, now, it was very different. There was the Captain, for whom, from one point of view, it might be said that people could do so little, and yet leave so much undone. That aspect of the matter did not present itself to Mio, as she happily performed the many little services which seemed possible, fetching and carrying, and seeing that things were left neither out of nor in his way. Even more happily she had discovered that her violin could be turned to account as a source of enjoyment in which he shared. Partly it consisted in accompanying her practice on his 'cello, that at first had somewhat overawed her as it hollowly murmured and muttered. But she felt herself highly honoured, and she profited much thereby. David Madden called them the Grasshopper and the Beetle, with allusions to the works of Browning and Tennyson, not understood by Mio, and for a while distressing to her. He never guessed, rightly, the reason why once, as he walked with her to the strand, and on hearing the 'cello in the distance remarked: "Ah, there the beetle boometh!" she had seemed

literally to jump for joy, and had exclaimed: "Oh, yes, so it does—it boometh—a beetle boometh. Of course, that was what you called him—a booming beetle." The word, he conjectured, had taken her fancy, or she was pleased at perceiving the resemblance between the sounds. In fact, however, she having heard of a *blind* beetle, had reluctantly assumed that this explained Mr. Madden's bestowal of the nickname, and her pleasure was caused by relief from a thought which lowered him in her esteem.

Fantastic troubles of this kind, indeed, were to be met with at Letterbrack as in every other place, and things more material did not always go smoothly in the Maddens' household. Yet their jerks and jolts never were magnified into earthquakes, prolonged by wrangling and lamentation, as was wont to happen at Craiganogue. More often than not some elements of absurdity cropping up gave matters a ludicrous turn, and a general atmosphere of happy-go-luckiness prevailed, softening harsh outlines, and drawing a veil over deficiencies. Larry Fahy was most likely the person who appreciated it least, but he possessed a resourceful invention, which had suggested to him a method of extracting solace from what he considered one main grievance, the dilapidated state, namely, of the premises at Drumatin House. He was thus employing himself one day three or four years after the affair of the ink-stained blouse, when there befell unexpectedly an interruption, the origin of which must be sought as far off in space as the County Tyrone, though in time not more remote than the morning of the day before yesterday.

Mr. and Mrs. Hill-Clarke were then breakfasting at Vale Mount, and the incident may be said to have begun with his remark on the excellence of the ham-toast which he was eating. "It's really first-rate," he said. "I

advise you to take a bit while it's hot." But what his wife did take was heart of grace presently to venture once more on an attempt which she had already repeatedly made, so far, without any success. At this time Vi Hill-Clarke was the mother of three children, twin boys and a girl-baby six months old ; but she did not possess, in addition to these cornelians, that pearl necklace, which she had years ago declared herself confident of being able to procure from her husband. Nevertheless, she had since then let no opportunity slip. A renewed effort had marked the approach of every gift-bearing anniversary. Christmas, wedding, birthdays, found her ready to bring forward her views about the most appropriate present. Being rather scantily endowed with inventive powers, she invariably introduced the subject by a comment on the exceptionally low price of pearls which she believed to exist ; the possession of that belief apparently quite exhausted her imaginative faculties. Mr. Hill-Clarke had therefore learned to recognize the preliminaries, and was prepared for what would follow, when she now observed in an ostentatiously casual manner : " By the way, did you happen to see the extraordinary fall there's been lately in the price of pearls ? People say that just at present you can get them for next to nothing."

" Get something for taking them away, I shouldn't wonder," he said jocularly.

" Oh, nonsense ! " Vi said, encouraged by this face-tiousness, for he sometimes became so cross at mention of the subject that it was useless to persevere. " But seriously I was thinking of my birthday next Thursday week. If you ever had any idea of giving me that little string of them, wouldn't this be the best time ? For you can't tell when the price may go up again, you know."

"Oh, as for prices, my dear girl, you don't know what you're talking about," he said forbearingly. "There's a general slump all round, as you'd see if you looked at the Stock Exchange reports—not that you'd be any the wiser. Everything's going down with a run. I don't believe that my investments are within fifteen per cent. of what they were valued for this time last year, and that's a fact."

It was a fact which did not convey much intelligible information to Vi's mind, but she caught at the word "investment." "Everybody says that real jewellery is always a safe investment, because you can sell it again whenever you like."

"To be sure you can—for next to nothing, as you say yourself," Mr. Hill-Clarke rejoined with sarcasm.

But Vi was not to be pinned down thus. She produced another argument. "And then there's Babs—by the time that she's grown up, I'll be as old as the hills; too old to wear pearls, so they'll do nicely for her." The mention of Babs was really a well-conceived plan, for Mr. Hill-Clarke took a degree of fond pride in his first and newly-acquired daughter, which, truth to say, stirred some jealous feelings in her mother. But though it did move him to say :

"Poor little mite! That's a long look-out. There's no saying what fine things her old Daddy may be able to get for her by that time," he was not led to hold out any hopes less remote than that vague and distant decoration of Babs far in an irrelevant future. Any hope, that is, of action on his own part. He proceeded to speak of a possible donor : "I'll tell you what, Vi, your best chance of fitting yourself out with jewels for nothing at all, if you've set your heart on that, seems to me to be that queer old cousin of mine, Clementina Madden, who lives at Letterbrack. I've often heard that she had some

fine ones left to her, and from anything I know of her, I should say that she probably keeps them tumbling about in some old rag-bag or waste-paper basket. Nobody there cares a rush about anything except tweedledum and tweedledee; they're a queer set."

"Of course, it's a pity they should be thrown away on her; but I'm sure I don't see what difference it makes to me," Vi said sourly, disappointed.

"Why, I daresay she'd hand them out to you as soon as not if you asked her," said Mr. Hill-Clarke. "That's the promiscuous sort of person she is. But I must go and answer a couple of these letters." He went off to his business-room, feeling that he had disposed of the recurrent pearl question this time in a good-humoured and agreeable manner.

In about half an hour, however, Vi appeared to him with an envelope in her hand. "And I've been thinking, Gilbert," she said, "that perhaps, after all, I *had* better go and stay a bit with the Hamiltons at Corryglas. It's the second time Cousin Mary has asked me, you know, so it doesn't seem very civil not to. I suppose it *is* rather a deadly little hole of a place, but it must be quite within a drive of Letterbrack, and one could easily go to see the Maddens."

Gilbert suddenly threw himself back in his chair, and laughed with loud detached guffaws. "Haw—haw—haw! Well done yourself, Vi! So you're seriously contemplating an attempt on old Cousin Clem's pearls. I only hope that you won't attack her *Vi et armis*; you must try blandishments first and wheedle her out of them, if you can, by fair means."

Vi could not see that there was anything to laugh at in what she had said; but she did not mind his laughing, as he apparently had no objection to her plan. She replied: "It would be queer *not* to go and see them when

one was within reach. And then I could ask her to show me the pearls, and I could drop a few hints about their being my favourite jewels, and not having any, and all that. They can't do any harm, and if she doesn't take them, I'll be no worse off than I was before. When pearls have got discoloured, they can be set to rights again without much trouble, can't they ? ”

“ Blessed if I know,” Gilbert said gloomily. He had not by any means desired to revive the project of this expedition, which would cause him some expense and bother. “ *I can't possibly go, you know,*” he reminded her discouragingly.

“ You weren't asked,” was Vi's prompt repartee, and she continued : “ It's not at all a troublesome journey. I'll go by the two o'clock mail this afternoon, and take Susy Davis with me and Chappie and Chippie, as I always intended to, if I ever went ; and I'll sleep to-night at Craiganogue, and leave them there. Now that they're running about they're not a bit of nuisance ; it amuses Flossie to look after them, and Babs will be all right here with Mrs. McHugh. Then I'll go on to Corryglas to-morrow by an early train. I heard this morning from mother, and she says that father's beginning to fuss about bringing Mio home for a while from Letterbrack, and, of course, she can come back with me. So that's another advantage of going. I haven't been away anywhere for ages. I wonder whether she has only a necklace or a whole set ? ”

Thus it came about that on the next day but one Larry Fahy met with the aforesaid interruption. He was in the harness-room, filling up with a neat, flourishy script some large sheets of ruled paper. The task, which had occupied him for a considerable part of the rainy forenoon, was, so to speak, a labour of love and hate, or, at least of liking and disliking. It resulted from a mild

chronic feud between himself and Miss Madden, which every now and then led to an outbreak of small hostilities. A very usual cause was some difference about the scope of his services, which were in theory altogether at Captain Delancy's disposal, but which in practice generally followed the haphazard way of the household and distributed themselves according to circumstances. Hence arose contention. For Larry, though extremely obliging, was in no less degree punctiliously particular that he should be understood to *oblige*, and he jealously resented anything which he regarded as an attempt to encroach on his rights and privileges. On this occasion Miss Madden had ill-advisedly assumed that he was going to mend a broken pane in the kitchen window, and had so informed the cook. He had done jobs of the sort habitually for years past; nevertheless, he expressed unbounded amazement at the suggestion that he could possibly have taken upon himself any such a thing, without with your leave or by your leave, and it no business of his to be obtruding panes of glass into other people's windows. Then Miss Madden, on hearing a report of these dignified sentiments, had, instead of adopting an apologetic tone, said calmly that it would be better to get over Andy Sullivan the glazier from Trantstown, and have the pane put in *properly*. A flout so marked clearly called for the vengeance which Larry was preparing to wreak.

It took the form of a long and elaborate list, ostensibly comprising the articles which would be requisite, on the hypothesis that he was expected to put the place into some sort of decent repair. This, with a note appended to the effect that it was not the one-half of what would be wanted for doing anything more than prevent the old premises from falling asunder in flitters before their faces, he proposed to present to Miss Madden, as a criti-

cism on the condition of her residential property, and also on the nature of the demands made upon himself.

While he was thus occupied, being about to end his list, which had magnificently begun with a dozen gallon cans of green paint, by adding a pound of putty and a ten-inch square of glass, its only practical item, when Katty McNulty came bolting across the yard, clattering where there were cobblestones, and splashing where there were puddles, in indiscriminating excitement. She accounted for it panting :

"Larry—you're wanted round immediate to the front door. A strange lady and gentleman's after driving over in one of them quare yokes that goes by themselves, and he wants you to show him the way round here with it, that he may stand it in one of the sheds out from under the rain, while he's inside in the house ; for it'll presently be teeming again. And after that, Mrs. Doyle says somebody'll have to skyte down to Nolan's, and fetch home a bit of meat for the luncheon ; for if they be stopping, there's not above what would make a couple of spoonsfuls of mince left on the cold loin of mutton."

Mrs. Hill-Clarke's zeal on her quest had led her to seize the very earliest opportunity of arriving at Drumatin House, and this was a seat in Mrs. Hamilton's brother-in-law's motor-car ; not means she would have chosen. Motoring was in those days still considered rather hazardous, at least by country folk, and Vi had not a daring disposition. The weather, too, could only in flattering terms be described as nothing worse than showery. But the tug of that obsessing pearly string prevailed over every resisting drawback, so that it brought her, damp and dishevelled, to the Maddens' door, at an hour which the invaded household was justified in calling unearthly. Her novel experiences during the rapid fifteen-mile rush occupied her for a while with a

flow of narrative. They had had some adventures. An old man, who had passed by while they were stopping to put up the hood, had said that to have the likes of such machines going about the roads was enough to bring a curse on the country. Then they had killed a hen, that would *not* get out of their way, but Mr. Davidson had just poked it into the ditch, and there was nobody about, so it didn't matter a bit. And they had all but run over a child; the little wretch must needs come tearing out of a cottage just as they went by, and Mr. Davidson had to steer nearly into the bank to avoid it. Children playing in the middle of the road were endless nuisances, and ought to be kept off it, for they never seem to get any sense. Altogether it was very like going in a bit of a railway train that had broken loose. Whirling so quickly round corners did rather frighten her, but she was sure she would soon get used to it, and Mr. Davidson drove beautifully.

Naturally, however, the real object of her visit soon rose again to the surface. Having plausibly enough misrepresented herself as come to arrange about the return home of Mio Helveran, and of Carrie Quin, whose invitation by the Maddens she had regarded with sisterly disapproval, she approached the pearls, spending little time in beating about the bush. Mr. Davidson had, on the passing of the shower, carried off Mr. Madden and Captain Delaney for a drive, and Mrs. Hill-Clarke was being entertained in the library by Miss Madden. The shabbily eccentric aspect of herself and her surroundings, as, enveloped in the rough and discoloured folds of her voluminous garment, she sat on a sofa, through whose turkey-red cover the horsehair stuffing emerged here and there in black rolls like small compressed thunderclouds, did not raise her visitor's expectations of being on the track of any valuable jewellery. Still, she per-

severed with her intention, and when she had disposed of the journey to Craiganogue, she made in her best company manner the little speech that she had rehearsed beforehand.

"I've been told, Cousin Clementina, that you possess such a lovely pearl necklace. I'm simply devoted to pearls; in fact, I'm quite silly about them. They're my very most favourite jewel. And, do you know, I haven't got a single one of my own, except just this little ring—my engagement ring—of course, I prize it beyond everything, but there, it's only a *ring*, which doesn't show them off to the best advantage at all, as a necklace does. I'm always longing for one. I wonder would you mind showing me yours? I should love to see it. They interest me immensely."

Though Vi's hopes had not mounted high, her Cousin Clementina's response brought them down so abruptly that a shock of disappointment could not but ensue.

"Pearls?" said Miss Madden. "Now what can have put that into your head? Such things are about as much in my line as explosive bullets, and quite as unlikely to come in my way. I can acquit my friends of betraying any wish either to decorate or destroy me, and certainly I've never gone in for anything of the sort myself. No, my dear, I'd gladly display to you my pearls from the ocean, but I fear you'll have to wait until they have been dredged up."

Evidently then, Vi said to herself, it was all a myth about the necklace, though she did not see why Cousin Clementina should have mixed it up with nonsense about bullets. Indeed, nobody who saw her could think it in the least likely that such a queer-looking old scarecrow would have anything worth picking up off the roads. It was odd of Gilbert, and tiresome, to repeat such a stupid story. But after luncheon, when Mr. Davidson, who

seemed to be rather a connoisseur, was examining the musical instruments in the library, and Vi was telling Captain Delancy about an old blind man living near their place, Vale Mount, who used to be always working at a strip of coarse knitting, and when he came to the end of his ball, unravelled it all, and knitted it up again—she thought it a very good plan as it saved the cotton and he, of course, only did it just for the sake of the occupation, as knitting of that sort was really no use—Miss Madden joined them with a small box in her hand.

“It occurred to me at luncheon,” she said, “and that must have put the wine biscuits out of my head, that my godmother, old Aunt Dunriall, did ages ago leave me some description of gewgaws; probably I never looked at them at the time, so I’ve been rummaging upstairs, and, sure enough, I found these under a lot of old *Annual Registers* in the hanging-press on the clock-landing.” She opened the case, revealing three rows of pearls, fair-sized, symmetrically shaped and slightly discoloured. “You see, Mrs. Hill-Clarke, your christian name has slipped out of my recollection too,” she said, “your husband is better informed than I about my property, if it was he who told you.”

All eyes were turned on the necklace. Vi’s might have been said to jump at it, and her mouth seemed also to gaze along with them. But it was Mr. Davidson who made bold to lift the necklace up on dexterous fingers and examine it critically. He was a tall, lean, elderly person, whose long beard partially concealed the Jewish contours of his countenance.

“They’re good,” he said, “right good. They want to be restrung and that sort of thing.”

“Oh, they’re quite, quite lovely,” said Vi. “If they are a little yellowish, that doesn’t matter by candlelight,

like old lace. Gilbert will be delighted to hear that he has found them for you—at least, *as good* as found them. You are lucky to have such a sweet, becoming thing, Cousin Clementina, and to think of it lying there all this while with nobody to wear it! Do call me Vi; that's my absurd little name, you know. There's a most excellent place for getting jewellery done up at Athlone; we always go to it. Would you like the address? Or perhaps I could leave the necklace there myself on my way home. Or could Gilbert bring it to Belfast for you? He's often there on business, and, of course, the shops are first-rate. Oh, I hope he'll see you wearing it some day; he'd admire it hugely. He's always wishing he could afford a nice one for me; but pearls are so awfully dear just now."

"I hope that he *will* see it some day, but better bestowed than making me into a figure of fun," said Miss Madden, with a smile, in which Vi thought there was a meaning, and one wholly favourable to her own wishes. "As for jewellers, I think I'll employ the old Dublin firm who still cleans our watches, though, rather as a favour; they've grown so grand these times." She carried off her box, and as she receded down the long room, Mr. Davidson remarked to the others:

"You people in these parts don't seem to have much regard for your valuables. That necklace is really worth a pot of money, and Miss Madden apparently keeps it lying about in a kind of lumber-press. And this young lady"—she was Carrie, awkwardly wedged in between the piano and a rickety table, against which she from time to time lurched creakingly as she balanced herself on one foot—"is wearing what I see are very fine brilliants, set in the most utterly disfiguring fashion conceivable. They're thrown away entirely, Mrs. Hill-Clarke, in that ugly little glazed brooch, but you could

find nothing more suitable to make a handsome clasp for the necklace ; it wants one to be perfection."

He spoke as if assuming that she had some proprietary interest in both necklace and brooch, which at once gratified and tantalized her, because she knew it was not, and yet might possibly be, the case. So very possibly, indeed, that when a few days afterwards she and the two younger girls were starting for Craiganogue, she thought it worth while to say to Carrie, who was packing up some small things :

" If you weren't as perverse and stupid as an earwig, you'd give me over that hideous old hairy brooch, and let me get you a nice new pin instead ; one that's fit really to wear. I saw a charming gold lace-pin at Dawson's the other day : a squirrel eating an emerald acorn ; and there was a holly-spray with a bird's-nest on it, full of real pearls for eggs—awfully pretty ! " But Carrie merely said : " Don't you wish I may ? " and stuffed the brooch-box into her bag with a complacent smirk. Vi could only comfort herself by reflecting that if she did at any time particularly want those diamonds, she was sure they could be taken away from Carrie, as such a small child as Mio could not make a present of anything worth so much without the consent of her elders. Yet Vi was very soon to be on the point of acquiring them with no need for resort to any coercive measures.

The weather on the day of Vi, Carrie and Mio's journey from Letterbrack to Craiganogue was of the most ill-favoured July type. A mainly mud-coloured sky blurred all distances with slanted rain-streaks, until in the afternoon the west grew darkly brindled with smoky yellow and livid black, whence issued growls and gleams. Now Carrie, stout and robust, was a helpless victim to nervous misery at the approach of a storm, and abject terror in the presence of thunder and lightning. Her perturbation,

therefore, was great by the time that they reached the last stage homeward, a long drive on a jaunting-car across a bleak bogland, lit with quivering flashes, and resounding with explosive peals. When they had come about half-way, the glare and din took on such violence, that Matt Egan, the driver, held in his starting horse to recommend the seeking of shelter at an adjacent public. As Vi hesitated for a moment, Carrie, cowering cravenly beside her, pulled her by the sleeve, saying in agonized tones: "Oh, do let us go in, Vi, it's so dreadful—*do*, Vi, dear—and I'll give you the diamond brooch for yourself the minute we're inside, I promise." Her unheeded appeal ended in a shriek, for just then arose such a further crisis of flashing and crashing, that everybody dropped precipitately off the car, and fled headlong in at the tavern-door. Crouched in the darkest corner she could find, Carrie, while the storm raged, was pre-occupied exclusively with its horrors. But when it began to abate, she reflected with about equal degrees of relief that Vi could have heard neither the promise of the brooch nor the epithet "dear."

CHAPTER XIV

ONE misty autumn day, some two years later, Mio and her Cousin Jack went strolling through the hilly fields about Craiganogue. She was not long returned from Drumatin, which she had quitted with more than usual reluctance—why, she hardly knew, nor, though they shared the feeling, did those whom she left behind. Perhaps letters had by their tone conveyed a vague forewarning of clouds gathered greyly over Craiganogue. Certainly she found herself arrived in an atmosphere of domestic worries, dense and close as such an atmosphere grows where there is no ventilation from wider spaces. Carrie, now nearing eighteen, and grown up deeper into, rather than out of, a general and particular discontent, had hastened to tell Mio most of what she herself knew about the family's affairs. Their outstanding feature had lately been ructions on account of Fred's chucking the army, after all that he had cost for "grinders." Nothing would suit him now except farming in Canada, and he was then in London, staying with the Fenlows to see about it. She supposed it would end in his getting some more money out of Father, as *Fred* seemed to be always given anything he took into his head. There had followed a detailed contrast between his and her own experiences on this point, after which Carrie continued :

"Aunt Mabel was staying here last month—only for a few days, thank goodness—and her son Edward, the one that's in the Indian Civil, a most detestable little prig. He nearly had a fit when he found that there wasn't a bathroom, and another when Jack offered to teach him to swim. 'In the open Atlantic!' he said, and goggled through his eye-glasses as if someone had asked him to swim across to New York. Jack said afterwards that he wondered whether the young bounder expected to learn in a wine-glass. Flossie is rather in the blues about Fred; she always thought him something wonderful. And Gerald has latterly been as thick as thieves with the two young Hannays, and continually going over to the Vicarage. He seems to have some notion of taking a class in the Sunday school. Do just imagine Gerald!"

To a certain extent, therefore, Mio knew how things stood, when she joined Jack on his walk. She had felt a little regretful at his summons, when he, sauntering past the old harbour, had caught sight of her, and called: "Is that you, Mio? Come along, you lazy little miscreant. I'm just going a bit through the fields." For if he had not called, she would have been happier staying where she was, to go on with the deeply interesting fortunes of "Sylvia's Lovers." That she should stay did not even occur to her as a possible course. Its invasion by a swarm of enraged wasps would have made the harbour a hardly less tenable abiding place for her than the knowledge that Jack was walking off alone, when he wished for a companion. At the same time, she could not refrain from the thought that Carrie might have suited him just as well, and was probably doing nothing at all. If she had been, she certainly would have said: "Oh, don't bother; I don't want to." Mio could hear her—and wouldn't have minded a bit. As she walked silently along the black-berried hedge beside Jack, who

was doing something to his gun, Mio pondered on the matter, and concluded that Carrie's mind must be made differently from hers; but did not reach an opinion as to whether or no this difference were an advantage. On the whole, she inclined to the view that it was one which she, however, would rather not possess. Considering these things somewhat deeply, she did not hear Jack speak until he said:

"Why, you're quite wool-gathering, Mio; I've asked you twice which we should go by—Twenty Furzes or Ryarc-na-Glen?"

"Oh, any way at all," Mio said. "I was just thinking I sometimes wish that I didn't mind doing what other people don't like."

Jack looked slightly surprised, and then slightly shocked. "I say, Miss Mio," he said, "I hope you're not proposing to grow up into a suffragist, or anything awful of that sort? Girls who don't care what people think of them generally do." He spoke with the authority of his profoundly inexperienced twenty-second year, and Mio, overawed, hastened to disclaim all such alarming views.

"I don't want to grow up into anything in particular," she said; "I was only thinking." Then, conscious that she could not well explain to him what had started this train of thought, she turned the subject by calling his attention to what was, as she believed, a thrush perched on a boulder, grey among golden feathers of bracken, at no great distance. But to her dismay Jack replied:

"That a thrush? Why, it's a green plover," and was about to take aim at it, when the bird suddenly flitted itself out of sight behind a low rocky ridge.

Mio was relieved at this, as well as at Jack's failure to light upon any other victim in its vicinity. She much disliked the company of a gun, partly because its

report inevitably startled her, but chiefly because the results, when successful, were no less inevitably saddening. The stone-like drop to earth of what had a moment before been speeding through the sunlit air shocked her, even if the clod had never existed as anything better than a crow of ancient and evil countenance. Jack, though aware of this propensity, had always, and still regarded it as, an unaccountable childish fancy, which she would by and by outgrow. His upbringing and hereditary tastes made this almost the only imaginable explanation of the fact, and Mio's growth seemed to leave room for the acquirement of much more sense. Therefore, his attitude was tolerant and rather amused.

"Sure, you are now as pleased as Punch, I know, because I lost that shot," he said to her half reproachfully as they passed through a gap into another wide furzy field.

"I am glad you didn't kill it," said Mio frankly. "What's the use of killing things when they're just flying about for fun?"

"Plovers aren't at all bad to eat, my dear child," said Jack. "And if things are never to be killed," he added, arguing with larger disingenuousness, "what's to become of people's dinners?"

"They don't matter much, I think," said Mio. "And if *that's* really why you wanted to shoot it, you might as well go and kill cattle and sheep and pigs."

"Oh, that's not sport, you know," said Jack.

"I suppose I'm a person who is entirely destitute of the sporting instinct," Mio said, reproducing with solemn satisfaction a remark of Mr. David Madden's. She was pleased at finding that she understood and remembered it well enough to quote it appropriately and fluently.

Jack looked down on his cousin, a little startled, in his

turn. Looked down a long way, as human stature is measured, for Mio's dark head, though it had now uplifted itself to within but a few inches of its ultimate height, was far below the level of his eyes. Mio's diminutiveness no doubt increased the apparent incongruity of the fine-sounding phrase in which she saw fit to describe herself so glibly, and which surprised Jack almost as much as if she had suddenly fired off his gun.

"You're a queer young person, anyhow," he said. "I say, look there." He pointed so far ahead that short-sighted Mio could distinguish nothing among the furze-clumps mottling the grass, and with that he took aim and fired.

"You are horrid!" Mio said in an excruciated tone, with her fingers still in her ears. "And you might just as well have fired at Slieve Aghadore." Slieve Aghadore was dim on the horizon as a trail of blue turf-smoke.

"Come along and see what we've got," said Jack.

"Nothing at all," Mio predicted hopefully. "If there ever was anything, it ran or flew away."

But on its back in the middle of the small bush it had been jumping over, lay a young wild rabbit thoroughly tamed.

"You see, it was a good long shot," Jack said, rather as if he were apologizing than bespeaking approbation for his achievement.

"I daresay it was having fine times playing about with the others," said Mio.

"Well, it must have had lots of fine times on all these fine evenings; they're always out among the furzes towards sunset, running and racing," said Jack.

"It's no size," said Mio; "it can't have been doing anything for a long time."

"Well, perhaps it had had enough of doing that," said Jack. "The best part of the year's over, and

spending so much cold weather in their holes can't be very lively, I should think, for the rabbits that live through the winter."

"They might like it better all the same than—*what?*" Mio said, looking at the dead rabbit, which seemed to have stretched itself out for a preternaturally great leap.

"Nothing at all," Jack predicted again. "I suppose it was stopped much as if it had rushed up against a stone wall, and then it just came to an end."

"It was hardly worth while starting it, I should have thought," Mio said, dissatisfied, "for nothing else."

"Since now I am so quickly done for,
I wonder what I was begun for,"

Jack quoted, as he gathered up the rabbit by the hind legs and walked on, dangling it.

"So do I," said Mio. But he felt that he could throw no light on the subject.

"Old Nurse Lee," he remarked, "used to say that wondering was the way to nowhere and back again. Look here, Mio, we're no distance from her if we cut across this corner. We might as well bring her the little rabbit, and pay her a short visit. I haven't gone to see her for centuries, which rather aggrieves her."

Old Mrs. Lee welcomed her visitors with pleasure, and did not despise the gift of Mr. Jack's small bag. She would keep it, she said, for her own bit of dinner next day, and tender and tasty she made sure it would be. Mr. Jack was growing up a grand sportsman, like his father and his grandfather before him. As for Mio, visits from her had increased in value with the lapse of years on two grounds. Her frequent prolonged absences made them rare, for one reason, and, for the other, her being, though "something to the Quins," not

a Quin herself, gave Mrs. Lee, in her own opinion, more liberty in criticisms on them than could else have been permissible. She was disposed to avail herself of it now, because her feelings had not long since been outraged by the behaviour of the little Hill-Clarks on the occasion of a tea-party at which she had entertained them. With every wish to admire the children of her favourite Miss Vi, she found the thing impossible. Undoubtedly they were very disappointing, more particularly the twins. Miss Babs was quiet enough, and the baby only a couple of months old. But a most unprepossessing resemblance to their father was noticeable in all of them, and against Mr. Hill-Clarke had Mrs. Lee from the first conceived an ineradicable prejudice.

"Well now, Miss Mio, of course them two eldest ones, that they call Master Chappie and Master Chippie, are no more than children; you wouldn't be expecting any sense of them. But if a child was no age at all, you wouldn't like to see it trying to slip a currant scone up its sleeve, and looking round out of the corners of its eyes to watch was anybody noticing. And then the other one, Miss Mio, I give you me word he up and offered me a shiny new farthing he had, by way of a half-sovereign, for the big gilt bowl over there on the shelf. 'The same as ten shillings it is, you know,' says he, stuffing it into me pocket as quick as he could, so that I shouldn't get time to look at it too close, 'and I'll take the bowl along with me. *It's* not real gold at all,' says he."

"Perhaps he did really think that it was a half-sovereign," said Mio. "They seemed to me to be rather stupid children."

"Not he, Miss Mio," said Mrs. Lee. "Sure, I heard him whisper to Miss Flossie that he'd get it off me a great bargain, and that it must be worth pounds and pounds, for every bit of it was solid gold. A schemer he is, good-

ness forgive me for saying so ; and it's what I wouldn't say of any of the family, Miss Mio, you may depend." She was led to add this little apology by a sudden vague impression of the possibility that one of those odd-come-shortlies might see Miss Mio installed as mistress at Craiganoguc. " Growing up pretty enough she is, for all she'll never be an out-size. And poor Mr. Jack, that's a fine young man, wouldn't ever be likely to put himself in the way of seeing many young ladies. Too quiet he is to do much except steele about his own place. So it might be handy if he had to go no further than that for a wife, and belike as good a thing as he could do. I'd liefer see her in it than anybody he's apt to pick up about here."

With these speculations in her mind Mrs. Lee watched the two cousins walk most unsuspectingly away across the field, where she presently saw them meet Charlie Quin and two or three dogs returning from a stroll. Match-making, of a dimly distant kind, was perhaps in the misty air with its autumnal odour of burning potato-stalks, come wafted across a wonderfully wide stretch of country from a heap smouldering on the headland about which Owen O'Brien had been digging. For when at a turn in the shrubbery walk, Mio quitted her companions to fetch her book from the arbour, Charlie Quin, watching her out of sight, said to Jack, with more premeditation, it may be, than his casual tone implied :

" How the whole lot of you are growing up ! Why, there's even little Mio, the most junior of the clanjamfry, I believe, turning into quite a venerable young person. Not that she's tall enough to be considered a very ill weed, as the saying goes—no disadvantage to a girl in my opinion. Do you know, Jack, I've an idea that if in a few years' time you and she were to make a match of it, you might do worse."

"Might *she*?" Jack replied so quickly, and with so bitter an emphasis, that his father, taken by surprise, paused perceptibly before he made answer, at first rather-confusedly :

"She? Well, why should she?—Why mightn't she? I ought to say. A girl left like her with so few near relations—it's a lonely sort of thing. Certainly, I should think anyone would be glad to see her settled early among people she's known all her life, and with a home, so to speak, ready-made; she'd have that here, you know, and—well—a certain position in the neighbourhood at least. Mrs. Jack Quin, of Craiganogue, would always be somebody, and that's more than many a young fellow can offer his wife at starting, if ever. Oh, aye, Miss Mio might quite easily do worse than this." He was lounging against a low wall, surmounted by a much-gapped laurel-hedge, where they had stopped in view of the house front, towards which he nodded with a little complacency.

"It's a splendid old structure entirely," Jack said, "especially since those two right-hand pillars have acquired that graceful bulge."

His father was so conscious of having himself in other moods frequently animadverted on such defects that he could not with much consistency protest against this irony of Jack's. He did, however, rejoin: "There is room for improvements, no doubt. In fact, when the Land Commission sales come off, as they may now at any time, we must give the whole place a thorough overhauling and doing up. Clear away all the remains of those Italian-boy plaster images, for instance. But, of course, in any case, Mio's years too young yet to make any schemes of the kind practical politics. The notion just came into my head. You and she always seemed to take to one another. If anything ever did come of

it, I daresay by that time you may have less reason for turning up your nose at the old place, as you do now."

"I don't," said Jack, "not as far as I myself am concerned. It suits me right enough, and I'm used to nothing else. What strikes me is that Mio ought to have chances of hitting on something better than it, and people who've been dawdling about it all their lives without three ideas in their heads. And in all probability she will. It's not as if she was left destitute or awfully badly off. With her two hundred a year she'll be quite independent, and have no need to marry for a home as girls do in novels, and live miserably ever after."

Mr. Quin kicked a small shower of lichen off the wall with his heel in an access of irritation. He was annoyed by Jack's mention of two hundred a year, having an instinctive dislike of definite statements about business matters. Yet, at the same time, he was glad that the subject had been introduced. The product of these two sentiments was: "Oh, rubbish—two hundred a year! I doubt she'd ever have had any such thing. But I'm sometimes bothered to know exactly what to do about that money of hers."

"Has anything gone wrong with it?" asked Jack.

"Well, some infernal investments have turned out badly. It's my belief a gang of people ruined them by croaking. So that complicates matters, you see, to a further extent," Charlie Quin lucidly explained, "with respect to the repayment of sums advanced on account of that young ass Fred—every halfpenny of it as good as chucked into a bog-hole; and there he is writing over for more to start him in his farming foolery in Ontario."

"Who did make those advances?" Jack said, sorting out a question with considerable difficulty. "And was it Mio's money?"

"Why, strictly speaking, I suppose so," his father said. "But, of course, she'll have no control over it for the next half dozen years or more, and the trustees meanwhile have large powers."

"I thought trust-money was always very tightly tied up," said Jack, "and not available for anything of that kind."

"My dear fellow, people can't always be as strait-laced as all that comes to," said his father. "The thing's done every day. I myself lent your Uncle Bernard a thousand pounds of my own when he went out to the Argentine, and he paid it back all right a few years ago." He stated this with the air of one who adduces a clinching argument, but as Jack, with eyes gravely bent on the weeds and daisies, did not appear to follow it, continued in a gloomier tone: "They seem to be flourishing out there; at least, he talks of their coming home for good in two or three years, which he hardly would do unless he was making some sort of a pile. To tell you the truth, it would suit me just as well if he stayed where he is. He's my co-trustee, you know, although he's left the whole business on my hands all these years, and rather inclined to take your view of things: to be fussy and punctilious about trifles. I shouldn't wonder an atom if he kicked up a row about this wretched two thousand of Mio's that I sold out, unless I've got it invested again by that time, which I don't clearly see my way to doing—not at present."

"Wasn't there the thousand you said he paid you back?" suggested Jack.

"Owed every fiver of it," Charlie Quin said curtly.

"Couldn't you raise it on a mortgage, then, or something?" said Jack. "*Anything*—money-lenders even——"

His father laughed. "Go to the Jews!" he said.

"Do you mean that for a piece of good advice, Jack, or merely an imprecation? The state of affairs is hardly desperate enough to justify either one or the other. As I was saying, your uncle may be disposed to make humguffins about the matter; but, on the contrary, he mayn't care to interfere, as I've had the management of it so long. And in that case there'll be no rows, and no need to hurry."

"I wasn't thinking of him or his rows," said Jack, flushing vividly, and without looking up, "but of Mio and her money. Why, that's about half of what she had, and you seem to think that part of it has been lost outright. I don't understand it," he said, though he did wretchedly well, "but it seems to me that the only possible thing to be done is to pay it back immediately somehow or other. I suppose the old shanty could be sold, if there was nothing else? It wouldn't fetch much, but there's the land."

"And your mother, and sisters, and the rest of us, take up our abode in the nearest union?" said his father. "My dear fellow, you're simply raving, and really without any reason. It's not as if Mio would eventually lose a penny, or was losing one at the present moment, for you may be sure I'm paying her a precious sight higher interest on the money all this while than she'd get in any sort of investment."

"Oh, of course that makes a difference," Jack said, looking up with some relief.

"I should think it did," his father said. The very large arrears into which the payment of this interest had fallen being a trivial detail kept habitually far in the background of his mind did not now inopportunately emerge. "No doubt it's highly desirable that the business should be settled as soon as possible. The main difficulty is the delay in these confounded Land Com-

mission sales; however, that can't go on indefinitely. And, in the meanwhile, one advantage of the alliance I mentioned would be its preventing the kind of botheration which might crop up in certain circumstances. Suppose, for instance, Mio was marrying somebody else, and there were settlements to be made, and all that? Or if she wanted to go off and live on her own hook when she comes of age? girls are so uncommonly independent and enterprising nowadays that you never know where to have them. I remember when they used just to stay at home peaceably till somebody came along and took them somewhere else, or didn't come as the case might be. But if she married you, the whole thing would be a family affair, so to speak, and we could bide our time. However, it's all miles too far ahead to take into serious consideration. And now it's about tea-time, so I'll look round the stables before I go in."

To the yard he betook himself, feeling that he had relieved his mind, on the whole, by this confidence, and hoping that he had usefully thrown out a suggestion, which might later on lead to the least troublesome method of settling his financial affairs, so far as his little ward was concerned. He had not accomplished this, it is true, without to some extent stirring up Jack, who was inclined to be rather an ass about money matters, not close or mean, what you could call, but over-particular, which is always a mistake, and with an especially idiotic prejudice against letting accounts run on to a comfortable length. Still, Jack never made himself disagreeable about anything; that might be said for him. He would no doubt soon get used to the notion of the loan and see that it was harmless and unavoidable. Quite possibly, too, he might adopt that more romantic idea. In point of fact, Charlie Quin reflected, he did not himself generally approve of cousins marrying;

but circumstances alter cases. If people were to be continually drawing hard and fast lines, they would soon find themselves in a queer sort of wire entanglement. This simile, encouraging a judicious laxness of practice, if not of principle, occurred to him in the stable, where he was giving sugar to an old roman-nosed, white-streaked hunter, and it seemed to end the episode not unpleasantly.

Jack, loitering by the wall, instead of as usual accompanying his father to the yard, did take the whole matter into very serious consideration. It had come upon him with a shock, for although since he first began to observe and criticize such things, to disapprove had been a familiar sequel, he had never before judged adversely a case of so much importance. Many a time had he been annoyed at slipshod ways of doing business, which were, as far as he could see, imperfectly honest. Only the other day, for instance, he had vainly attempted to procure payment of Mike Kinsella's long-standing account for shoeing and repairs. The smithy was a small, struggling concern, and Kinsella obviously could not well afford to be out of his money. Jack had been vexed by his failure, but in what a minor degree; scarcely at all appreciable compared with this new trouble. It was nothing less grave than a conviction that his father had committed a flagrant legal offence. Though Jack's knowledge of law might be described as rudimentary, he was not unacquainted with the terms "breach of trust" and "fraudulent trustee"; he recalled them now, flushing so hotly that he shivered next minute as if he had stepped into a cold cellar. They seemed, indeed, to have filled his world as if they had suddenly become the main ingredient in its atmosphere, and that ingredient were humiliation. Their actual legal consequences, penalties, scandals, were not in his thoughts, which

stopped short to dwell on the fact that liability to such visitations of the community's wrath had been incurred, justly, by his father. These meditations resulted in feelings of grief and rage, not by any means against his father, but against fate, and they were singularly disagreeable. As a way of escape from them, he set about making excuses. Of course, his father had just drifted into it—that must have been how the whole thing happened—he drifted into it. There was something consolatory and soothing about the phrase, notwithstanding that to form any idea of the process at once clear and exculpatory might have been difficult. Looking back through the past half-dozen years or so, Jack remembered having now and then noticed that his father would seem for a while to possess more ready money than usual for expenditure on miscellaneous superfluities, which often took the form of presents. One of these affluent periods was about the time of Vi's marriage, and during its continuance he had given Jack a very good gun and a well-bred setter, both still extant. If he had rivalled the most heinous example on record of impious ingratitude, Jack could not have felt more guilty than he did when, along with his recollections of those gifts, came the accusing conjecture that they had been purchased with the proceeds of unlawful conversions. He turned away from it hastily, only to be affronted by the plan, deliberately made, he perceived, though suggested as if half in joke, that he should marry Mio for the purpose of hushing it all up. Thereupon he turned away bodily and went into the house, seeking some more effectual distraction, which he found in the hall.

For he arrived there almost simultaneously with a telegram. At the door a boy and a bicycle were waiting scarlet and grey in the thickening twilight, while an orange-brown envelope was hastily opened amid an

excited group, since at Craiganogue telegrams still came with a thrill. This was a reply-telegram from Miss Madden of Drumatin ; and it said : " Let Mio come immediately, for my brother is dying, and wishing to see her."

Charlie Quin scribbled with a pencil-stump on the reply-form : " We are starting at once," and sent it off. The wish of the dying man roused instincts which were gratified by that promise to fulfil it, made as he felt with dramatic promptitude ; he knew that there would be time to catch the eight o'clock mail ; he rather liked the bustle of the sudden journey, and he had the pencil end in his pocket ready to hand. These circumstances all helped to bring about his action, which, failing any one of them, he would perhaps never have taken. It was forthwith strenuously opposed by his wife, who faced him, deeply disapproving, as he turned round from the door.

" Good gracious ! Surely you're not intending to pack off the child by herself at that hour of the night ? "

" Of course not ; I'll take her."

" Well, I must say I think to-morrow would be amply time enough. If he's so ill as Miss Madden makes out, you won't find him alive whether you start sooner or later. But very likely he isn't near as bad as she imagines. By all accounts she must be a person with very little common sense."

" One can't run risks of that sort, even so. We must get a few things packed up, and dine a bit earlier. It's six-thirty now by me, but I may be a few minutes slow. Jack, just run and tell Peter Riordan that we'll want the car at twenty after seven sharp."

" How can you possibly suppose," said Mrs. Quin, " that you'll be ready by then ? You won't have time to eat a morsel of dinner, and nothing will be half done.

You'd far better send somebody to stop the messenger, and, in any case, wait till to-morrow."

"Nonsense! nonsense! He's nearly at the post-office by this time, and I hope they'll have my wire now in a few minutes at Drumatin. I'll go and stick a few things into my bag; we need take next to nothing."

"And there's Mio without a decent frock; her new one isn't ready, and she won't have a stitch of mourning if—it's essential. Of course, staying in the house, she'd have to wear it, though he's no relation." Calling this after her husband as he ran upstairs, she came to a sudden stop, as if somebody had caught hold of her. But it was nothing more tangible than the imploring gaze of her niece, Mio, whose eyes seemed to have grown so unnaturally large and dark as to make her face look pinched and white.

"Oh, Aunt Ethel—you *said* you were sure that he wasn't very ill!" At which Mrs. Quin all at once felt ashamed of the futile objections that she had been urging, chiefly from perverseness, and she said:

"Indeed, I think it's most likely, my dear. Come along and put on your things. I daresay you'll find him a great deal better when you get there."

The announcement of this foolish opinion caused Mio to feel more liking for her Aunt Ethel than she had ever done before, which was rather absurd; but she was bewildered by a novel experience, because never before had such perils threatened the persons in her world who, through half her life, had always made most of her. With David Madden would go the eyes in which she had un-faillingly found favour, and the prospect scared her so inexplicably that she grasped without discrimination at any reassuring word, the speaker whereof was lovely to behold as an evangelist of hope.

So they set off in good time on the old car, her uncle

and herself, with Jack's company to the station, and Richard driving the shaggy-footed chestnut. But, after all, Charlie Quin never went to Letterbrack. Quite close to the station, when the chestnut had begun a brisker trot, apprehending his goal, the car abruptly and violently swayed and heaved like a row-boat struck by a squall; on one side a seat tilted up, on the other a wheel collapsed, and the whole vehicle capsized, shaking off its load in all directions. The cause was the breaking of a bolt, about which Peter Riordan had felt doubtful for some time past, but which he had put off bringing to the forge by reason of Mike Kinsella passing remarks on the subject of his long unpaid account, so that Peter preferred to have as few doings and dealings there as he could contrive. Then in the ill-lighted Duncloyne street sprang up a noisy crowd, whose shouts, mingled with ungainly prancings and clatterings of hoofs, confidently declared that the whole of them were killed dead. In reality, they were much less the worse than might have been expected, seeing that among them all there was no injury save a rather badly wrenched ankle, serious only because it had befallen the head of the expedition, which seemed thus likely to fall through.

This, however, Charlie Quin would not permit. He was too genuinely concerned about the unknown David Madden to tolerate the thought of his last wishes being not only unfulfilled, but mocked by the disappointment of a broken promise. Plainly he could not proceed on his journey a hobbling cripple, so the charge of Mio must devolve upon Jack.

"See here, Jack," he said. "You'll have to go along with Mio and look after her. Here's the money you'll want"—he hurriedly handed over his purse—"and you can take my traps. Cut off with you now to the station, or you'll lose your train. Oh, I'll get home all right.

There's sure to be someone going that way who'll give me a lift." And, true for him, old Andy Joyce from Lisnaglen, jogging by presently on his car, was proud and pleased to accommodate Mr. Quin of Craiganogue with a seat.

As for Mio's and Jack's journey, it was marked by no adventures other than the accident that brought about his visit to Drumatin.

CHAPTER XV

DAVID MADDEN had his wish to see Mio again ; in fact, he saw her several times during the three or four days following her return. He was sitting up in an arm-chair in his own room, looking much as usual, a little shrunken perhaps, with the outline of his face more finely drawn ; and he talked much as usual, too, though his voice somehow sounded thinner and higher. With Jack, from whom he invited a visit, he discussed shooting and other field sports. Jack's opinion was that there seemed to be nothing serious amiss with him. Mio played for him, and Captain Delaney came with the 'cello. One evening they had quite a grand concert, Mr. Madden playing a while himself, but they missed the accompaniment of the piano, down in the library, out of reach. His sister could only listen in the background. Standing gaunt and dishevelled beside the hospital nurse, she was a foil to the trim navy-blue figure with lily-white cuffs, collar and cap. Then the bright firelight, which had been flickering in butterfly flights round and round the room, died into a wingless glow, so that a shaded lamp gave all the illumination, and from their darkened corner only Miss Madden's eyes were visible, peering and shining. Mio remembered how, long ago, she had teased Alfred Armitage about them, and his retort about the eyes of old Mag, the black cat. The

party broke up in very good spirits. David Madden highly complimented Mio on her progress in bowing, and desired that she should come and see him next morning, as soon as she had read the newspaper to the Captain, formerly his own task.

"If you are late, I shall know that you have had to spell *all* the long words," he said; for it was a standing joke of his professedly to regard her as very small and illiterate.

She had parted from him laughing, and gone off to bed with her ears full of merry music; so it was all the greater shock to be wakened on the morrow by the news that he had passed away in the night.

At first it appeared to Mio that merely as a decent matter of course, laughter must have gone out of the world for evermore, together with music, and the other things that nobody could now bear to think of again. Yet on the very morning after the funeral, Miss Madden bade her and Jack go and sit for a while with Captain Delancy, and try to amuse him a bit. The difficulty about mourning apprehended by her Aunt Ethel had not arisen, as Miss Madden would not allow Mio to wear any, though herself she provided with a black cloak and long-veiled hat, in which she looked irreducibly like other people. She was looking over drifts of papers in the library when she gave these injunctions to Jack and Mio. Jack had been suggesting that he should return home, but this Miss Madden refused to permit for a few days yet, on the grounds that while she was unusually busy he would be company for Mio.

"You've got none of her gifts," she observed, thinking aloud, as she grew more prone to do. "I daresay you aren't clever at all—not that one often meets with an Irishman who's stupid all through—but good-natured and a good sort. Oh, sinners! I wonder what sort of

folly possesses people to store up old letters and the like? If I were beginning again, I'd destroy every one of them before it was a day old, as if they were so many cockatrices' eggs, for stings they'll grow as sure as fate, and the time will come when you have to handle them."

"Why don't you burn them all up now without looking at them?" said Mio, surveying the widespread litter, and feeling, in spite of herself, that some kind of gratification might be derived from the spectacle of such a blaze.

"Ah, when the cockatrice has caught sight of you first, my dear, it exercises a horrible fascination," said Miss Madden. "I'll never get free in that summary way. But do you and Jack go and sit for a while with Captain Delaney, and try to amuse him a bit. . . . If it wasn't for the Captain—" they heard her say to herself as she resumed her reading. And from time to time, later on, she might have been overheard repeating this half phrase, which she never finished aloud.

Some success rewarded their efforts to amuse Captain Delaney, whom they found sitting over the fire, for the drizzling day was chilly, in a little room which looked towards the sound of the sea. Jack, groping about rather at random for subjects of conversation, hit on the absurd old plaster figures which adorned the grounds at Craignogue, and, more particularly, the group restored by Michael McEriff. The description of his composite, daddy-long-legs Pan took the Captain's fancy, and the two cousins interchanged congratulatory glances as they joined in his laugh. But then an unwelcome interruption occurred. It was announced that Mr. Hill-Clarke and another gentleman were waiting in the library, and would Mr. Quin be pleased to see them? Miss Madden would not, and was above in her own room.

Jack went, not pleased by any means. Ever since a

conversation inadvertently overheard years ago at home he had been inclined to regard his brother-in-law with distrust, which, not justified so far by any especial reason, had gradually taken the shape of a simple dislike, calling for no reason at all. As for the unknown other gentleman, to a person of Jack's upbringing strangers always appeared in the light of unpleasant probabilities. Crossing the hall, he wondered what on earth had brought them bothering there, and hoped that whatever it might be, something would very soon take them away again.

Mr. Hill-Clarke's errand was one for which he might have been commiserated, had stress of circumstances thrust it upon him. Perhaps, indeed, this had actually occurred, but, if so, the compelling circumstances were qualities inherent in his own mind, where they could not well be objects accessible to sympathy of that nature. In plain English, he had come to see what he was likely to get, immediately or eventually, from his Cousin David Madden's death, and to take steps which might improve his prospects in that connection. Foreseeing the possibility that an interview with Miss Madden would be declined, he carried in his pocket a letter, the composition of which had occupied a rather vacant time after dinner yesterday at his hotel. He would not send it to her until he had seen Jack Quin, in case after that some modifications should seem desirable. Otherwise, as it stood he considered it a well and judiciously-worded document, calculated to further his interests. To the same end he had brought with him his companion, Mark Davidson, brother-in-law of his wife's cousin, a meeting with whom he regarded as a lucky chance. For Mr. Davidson was a connoisseur of antiques, and in a small way, for commercial purposes, a collector, with an amateur's delight in grubbing among miscellaneous rubbish, and a professional's quickness of sifting and appraising.

So, falling in with him after the funeral, Mr. Hill-Clarke was glad when he agreed to drive over from the Hamiltons next morning, and pay a second visit to Drumatin House.

"From what I saw the time I was there with your wife," he said, "I shouldn't wonder if there was some good stuff in it still, being so out of the way—nice old bits of furniture. I'll like to take a look round, if opportunity offers."

In this case Mr. Davidson's interest was quite impersonal, just strong enough to offer a means of flavouring an else insipid afternoon. Not so Mr. Hill-Clarke's. He would himself have described it as a reversionary interest; and, as such, it seemed to have been materially strengthened by David Madden's death. What he hoped for from that event had been a will leaving a life interest in the property to Clementina Madden, with a reversion to Gilbert Hill-Clarke, who would thus have nothing to fear from any capricious dispositions on the part of a foolish old spinster. What he wished, though hardly hoped for, had been a legacy immediately enjoyable. What had actually taken place fulfilled neither hope nor wish, his cousin having died intestate. Mr. Hill-Clarke had ascertained that this was an indisputable fact. Not only was there no will forthcoming, but several persons testified to having at various times heard Mr. Madden declare that he intended to make none. Everything, therefore, went absolutely to his sister, and the foolish old spinster spectre was not laid.

It did not, however, greatly perturb her heir-at-law. In Mr. Hill-Clarke's opinion she was, though foolish, even less likely than her brother to take energetic and enterprising steps about matters of business. Probably she would follow his example and leave no will, so that the next-of-kin would duly succeed, in the person of Gilbert Hill-Clarke, who since the recent demise of his

sister, the superannuated bridesmaid, knew himself to be next alone. The advantages of adopting this course formed the gist of his letter to Miss Madden. Wills, he assured her, were usually unnecessary and mischievous documents, likely to defeat their own ends, and lead to expensive litigation. This would be especially true in her case, where in equity, if not in law, no question could arise about her rightful heir, an understanding on the subject having, in fact, existed between her parents and his own, as she was no doubt aware. Last survivors of their dwindled generation, indirectly only through the Hill-Clarks, an aunt's descendants, could the two Maddens have looked to see their race continued. To Mr. Hill-Clarke it appeared that the circumstance must cause his old Cousin Clem to feel a peculiar interest in his young family, Chippie and Chappie and Gibbie and Babs, on whose engaging traits he consequently enlarged. With a few sentences couched in technical phraseology calculated to impress and overawe the uninstructed female mind, he wound up his letter. Then, after some pondering, which led to the conclusion that he might venture on it, he added a postscript.

During the two years elapsed since Vi's visit to Drumatin those hopes of soon possessing some goodly pearls, thereby kindled in her mind, and afterwards perseveringly cherished, had at length dwindled away into the indefinite dimness of a possible bequest. Some bitterness of feeling against the too pertinacious owner of the necklace accompanied this disappointment, and it seemed to have whetted the edge of her unsatisfied desire, so that her husband for some time past had been finding himself called upon to resist her resumed importunities. His own opinion, discreetly kept to himself, was that Cousin Clem probably had just forgotten any intentions she might have entertained of bestowing the

ornament upon Vi. Such a lapse of memory seemed quite consistent with what he knew of her idiosyncrasies ; and his knowledge further led him to conjecture that she might be reminded without much risk of giving offence. Now, accordingly, several things tempted him to hazard that risk. He was on the spot ; he was conscious of having before he left home spoken with imprudent confidence of his expectations from Drumatin, and he felt that so far as they were concerned he would return discredited ; he knew that his arrival with the necklace would make his home-coming a glorious triumph, and not only so, but would permanently free him from a species of nagging which sometimes got on his nerves. And his postscript ran :

" May I suggest that you would possibly find this a convenient opportunity for fulfilling your very kind promise, made to my wife on her visit to you a couple of years back, of presenting her with your set of pearls ? The idea occurs to me because I am aware that a melancholy event such as the present frequently necessitates the looking through of papers, garments, various items of personal property, etc., etc., which might bring the article in question under your notice. I need not say that if it meets your wishes, I shall have much melancholy pleasure"—*melancholy* was an afterthought, and had to be inserted, which slightly spoiled its effect ; pleasure unqualified appeared inappropriately festive—" in conveying to Vi your extremely handsome present, for which pray accept in anticipation our warmest thanks."

He was so well satisfied with this composition that he regretted the less his failure to obtain the interview with Miss Madden which would have made it a piece of lost labour. From his interview with Jack Quin he had expected little, and he found it dull and unproductive of

anything except an opportunity for Mr. Davidson to take a look round the library. That also was apparently uninteresting, to judge from his ejaculations as he strolled about, now taking down a dusty volume, and now scrutinizing the design on an inlaid table. "Absolutely worthless"—"machine-made"—"vamped-up trash"—such was the burden of the comments which reached the other two, as they manufactured halting small-talk by the languishing fire. But when he had almost made the circuit of the room, he stood still at a corner in which was a little pile of violin-cases. "These, I presume," he said, with decorous solemnity, "are instruments belonging to the late Mr. Madden?"

"I think so," said Jack, "all except the cobwebby one at the bottom. It belongs to my Cousin Mio, but there's only rubbish in it, I know. It was brought over by mistake from Craiganogue."

Uttered by an ignoramus, "rubbish" was a word which caused Mr. Davidson to prick up his ears, and he began to pull out the cobweb-festooned case, while Jack turned his attention to the dying fire, seeking to save its life by a supply of crumbled turf-sods. Presently Mr. Davidson, having opened the case, gave a very low involuntary whistle, and beckoned to Mr. Hill-Clarke, who crossed over to him, passing behind Jack, kneeling on the hearth-rug. Inside the case was a smaller one, which contained what looked like the wreckage of a violin. This Mr. Davidson was examining with an awe-stricken expression, and a touch as of one who handled fragile jewels.

"It's a *Strad*," he said to his friend in a mysterious whisper.

"*Nonsense!*" said Mr. Hill-Clarke.

"*It is one*," Mr. Davidson asserted. "I can give you an expert opinion on that. I studied them for a year

when I was going about with Latrolles. I couldn't be mistaken. Here's the label—1717—his golden period. Look at the head-piece, and the purfling! And I declare—yes—it's the original bow—and the pedigree." He eagerly unfolded a scrap of very yellow paper.

"But it's all in bits," murmured Mr. Hill-Clarke, perplexed at all this suppressed excitement.

"Not an atom of harm, as they're all here. A penny-worth of glue'll make it value for a couple of thou. at the *inside*. I'll tell you, Hill-Clarke," Mr. Davidson's whisper grew more mysterious, "at the present moment I could put my hand on a man who as likely as not would give three thousand pounds for this thing if he got the offer of it, and that's George Vanlink of Astrapolis, Minnesota, the multi-multiplex millionaire—corner in rock-salt, you know—who's staying in Queenstown now at the Crown Hotel, waiting for his secretary, I believe. He's rabid on collecting violins; you might ask him pretty well anything you liked for this."

"My word!" said Mr. Hill-Clarke. "I wish I had the asking."

There was a pause, while Mr. Davidson earnestly contemplated the biggest find he had ever come upon. Then they both glanced towards Jack Quin, who was still occupied in resuscitating the moribund embers with careful fragments of turf. Golden sparks as they ran to and fro, and blinked in and out among the fibrous network, were obviously engaging his attention, not the talk in undertones about old violins and American millionaires.

"I must say," Mr. Davidson said, "I should like to—to examine it more at leisure."

"The smaller case wouldn't be much trouble to convey," said Mr. Hill-Clarke. "Your rugs are in the hall—slipped under them it—wouldn't get wet."

On this hint Mr. Davidson acted. With such quickness that it almost seemed one continuous movement, he stood up, took off his light overcoat, slung it on his arm, lifted out the smaller case, which with a dexterous whisk he enveloped in the hanging coat folds, and laid it on a chair close beside the door. This was all done noiselessly behind Jack's back, while Mr. Hill-Clarke rapidly re-strapped the large case, and pushed it carelessly aside.

"I'd like," he said, "to show Davidson two or three of the old portraits in the dining-room. I suppose there'd be no objection, Jack?"

"I should say there wouldn't," said Jack. "I'm sure you know your way about here much better than I. If I leave this fire now it will collapse."

"Come along, Davidson, it's just across the hall," Mr. Hill-Clarke said. "Why didn't you take the coat," he remonstrated, when they were out of the room, "and put it with the rugs?"

"Better leave it where it is," said Mr. Davidson, "until we are just starting, so that I can bring it straight out to the car, and not be making two bites of a cherry."

The library door had scarcely closed behind them, when Jack quitted his stoking, and did several things with a speed which rivalled Mr. Davidson's. In effect, he gently emptied all the contents of the smaller case into the larger, strapping it up as before; and lest the smaller one should by its lightness prematurely betray its rifled condition, he filled it with a few of the paper-bound catalogues, reports and charitable appeals which were lying about. This done, he safely replaced it on the chair. A few minutes later he saw with furtive satisfaction Mr. Davidson bundle up his coat, and subsequently stow it away in the recesses of his whirring car. Then, as it sped hooting out of sight Jack went indoors, many eager

plans whirling in his brain, and one newly-sprung hope easing a dead weight of despondent anxiety which for some days past had burdened his usually cheerful spirit.

Ever since his father's communication about his dealings with Mio's property, Jack's mind had been possessed by the gloomiest forebodings about her future. He foresaw the remainder of her little fortune in like manner muddled away; then some, too easily imaginable, collapse of the family finances in general, and Mio left penniless to face the world as at best a typewriter, or a governess, or an hospital-nurse, occupations dismal, ill-paid, precarious, at which girls, he said to himself, "must have a rotten time." Moreover, so out of date was his point of view, that he shrank with instinctive aversion from the idea of his womankind earning their own living at all. And now that Mio should be threatened with such necessity, solely through a gross dereliction of duty, to give it the very mildest term, on the part of his father, was a harassing, a tormenting thought. He brooded on it continually, with an intense wish to set things right, gainsaid by a baffling sense of helplessness. Hence, probably, a half-unconscious casting about for ways and means kept his faculties on the alert, so that he had promptly grasped the significance of that whispered colloquy about the value of the wrecked violin. Amazing as were the sums mentioned, they did not appear to him entirely incredible. He had heard of collectors as people who would pay fantastic prices for their hobbies—hundreds of pounds for such a thing as an old postage-stamp. Dimly it seemed to him that he had also heard mention at times even of Strads, and he knew old violins to be valuable articles. But what had instantly made him keenly alive to the possibilities, as well as to the need for immediate action, was the plotted theft by those persons whom he described to himself as "the old

Jew swindler and that rascally husband of poor Vi's." If they once got hold of it, there would be an end of any benefit accruing to Mio. So now that their scheme was safely frustrated, how such benefits might be secured to her became the problem, not without difficulties, recognizing which he determined to solve it by a bold step. He would seek out this millionaire American, this violin-desiring Vanlink, and personally offer him the Strad. Queenstown was not much out of his way on his homeward journey; means of defraying the small additional expense were in his father's purse. If he failed to do any business, the loss would be small; if he succeeded in getting even one thousand, that would suffice to banish the phantom fear of a Mio reduced to utter penury through the unrighteous deeds of the person whom he could least endure to consider blameworthy.

Singular success attended his enterprise. In George Vanlink he found a man of enormous wealth, not destitute of humorous kindliness. That the instrument offered to him was what it purported to be he fully believed, an opinion endorsed by his specializing secretary; wherefore, having unbounded enthusiasm on his quest, Mr. Vanlink greatly rejoiced. But in a lesser degree he also rejoiced in the unsophisticated business methods of the Strad's proprietor. Particularly was he pleased with Jack's avowal that he would take two thousand pounds for it, but would be glad to get two thousand and five hundred. The state of Mr. Vanlink's finances made the difference between these two sums seem to him much what the difference between a florin and half-a-crown would seem to ordinary capitalists; and he gave Jack the half-crown. But he did more than this. Gathering from his visitor's remarks that he was at a loss how to set about investing his money, Mr.

Vanlink forthwith took the requisite steps, and put it for him into a concern absolutely safe, yet so good, that Jack's dividends would amount to one hundred and fifty pounds. This benevolent deed had its reward, for Mr. Vanlink was again amused by the haste with which Jack, before his departure on the following morning, sat down and wrote a will, briefly leaving all he possessed to his Cousin Hermione Elsie Helveran, as well as by the solicitude about its due execution, which caused him to keep a hand on Mr. Vanlink and his secretary while they were witnessing the document, lest any doubt should arise as to their having done so in one another's presence.

"I suppose you are over age?" Mr. Vanlink said, for Jack's hobbledehoy appearance suggested the possibility of a more fatal flaw.

"Well over, thank goodness," said Jack. "You see, the money really belongs to this little girl, but the simplest way seems just to leave it to her. Now it's all right. I was thinking there might be a railway accident, or anything going back. I'm most awfully obliged to you."

On his journey home Jack thought with much relief of the marked improvement in his prospects which attended his return. He must now, indeed, do his utmost to prevent any further alienation of Mio's patrimony, and to effect the making good of what had gone. But he would no longer be haunted by the dread that failure might entail on his little cousin downright destitution, or a life full of weary days spent among clack-clumpetty machines, or children who romp and squabble. Certainly it was a wonderful piece of luck, and it would never have happened if David Madden had not died just when he did. As he thought so much of Mio, he would probably be glad to know of it. Would he have a chance, Jack wondered? He also wondered, more

practically, what Hill-Clarke and Davidson had said when they discovered what was not in the violin-case. Their remarks, he conjectured, were probably strong, but in the circumstances could only pass between themselves. They would naturally more than suspect his intervention, and no doubt bear him a grudge therefor, a result which he contemplated with equanimity. Davidson, the old Jew, who seemed to go spying about, might hear that Mr. Vanlink had bought the Strad, and wouldn't he be on his hind legs? Let him, the old thief! With that there suddenly came across Jack's mind the remembrance of how and why he had decided that the history of these remarkable transactions must not be related at home; and he felt that his pleasure in them fell short of completeness. Still, he arrived at Craiganogue in very good spirits.

The discovery about which Jack had been speculating was actually made in the coffee-room of Mr. Hill-Clarke's hotel, whither Mr. Davidson had driven him. They wished to arrange about the disposal of their find, and both were feeling that much might be said on the subject. Mr. Davidson was eager for another look, which he nothing doubted would doubly assure him of his good fortune. Mr. Hill-Clarke watched with deep interest the unbuckling of the straps on the case.

"Key lost, of course," said Mr. Davidson. "I'll tell you what, we must get another at once. A risky thing to be carrying it about with no better fastening than a buckle." He lifted the lid as he spoke, and four eyes stared aghast at what was not to be seen. After a moment's pause: "Damn it all!" Mr. Davidson said comprehensively.

"You never took it out?" said Mr. Hill-Clarke.

"Not I—it was that young oaf—your brother-in-law, you said. He must have overheard us talking, and

nabbed it when you took me off to look at those old daubs in the dining-room."

"I advised you to bring it along with you," said Mr. Hill-Clarke.

"I suppose," said Mr. Davidson, "he'd have got at it just as easily in the hall."

"I'd never have thought he'd had so much gumption. He always seemed to me to have no ideas beyond rabbits and dogs—the young ass!" said Mr. Hill-Clarke.

"Well, there's an end of that," Mr. Davidson said, laughing sourly. "We needn't be at the expense of a new key, anyhow"—he shoved the case contemptuously away—"and there's no more to be said. We're only as we were."

"Not quite, with that chap laughing at us in his sleeve, and maybe making himself disagreeable, young beast," Jack's brother-in-law said gloomily. "Of course, *you're* not likely to fall in with him again; it's rather an infernal nuisance, though, for me."

Mr. Hill-Clarke had undeniably some reason to be down on his luck, which had played a practical joke on him, one of the most reprehensible things that luck can do. His home-coming was a very different affair from the marplot Jack's. Even from his wife, much less from himself, he could not conceal that his expedition to Letterbrack had been devoid of satisfactory results. Vi, indeed, though limited, perhaps more than usually, in her range of vision, turned a keen eye on matters that immediately concerned her, and was sensitive to possible dangers. Several now seemed to come within her ken.

"Everything left to that queer old woman!" she said tragically. "To do what she likes with! Then I wouldn't wonder an atom if not a farthing of it ever came to us. She'll leave it to other people, or cats or

dogs, or something—you'll see. There's that blind man they had moping about the place—what's to hinder her from leaving it all to him ? Or that brat of a child Mio ; they all seemed to think no end of her at the Maddens. I must say it was uncommonly stupid of the people at home to let her be there at all, when they knew how matters stood. She'll get round them with her idiotic fiddling. I daresay that's really the reason why old Miss Madden never sent me the necklace."

Her husband's mood just then could not tolerate the introduction of this particular subject, and he said with some asperity : " Oh, if you're going to nag about that nonsense, I'll be off and take a look round the place before tea-time." So for the rest of the day Vi's manner was stiffly starched with offended dignity, which his sullen chagrin neither sought nor tended to mitigate.

CHAPTER XVI

MEANWHILE, Mio, an object of solicitude, on different grounds, to her cousins Vi and Jack, was spending melancholy days at Letterbrack in the old house by the sea. They were the first that had brought into her experience the dead wall suddenly sprung up across a wonted and most pleasant pathway of her thoughts. The blank obstruction shut out of her life one whose share in it had been so large, that things which now were perforce done without any reference to him seemed senseless and indescribably dull. She was, in fact, profoundly bored as well as grieved by the departure of David Madden, who had helped her to learn many delightful things, and had never, judging by his ways with her, altered his opinion that a rough word might cause her to flutter off out of reach like a wild little bird, tamed, indeed, but winged. In her ignorance she naturally assumed that the slow-paced, grey days would never again quicken and brighten—would always be interminably void of interest and pleasure. Her elders, who were in like manner depressed, though they knew that time would soon begin to pass at a more normal rate—the most perhaps that they hoped from the future—could do little directly to afford her any consolation. Still, it was through them that she presently found some. Another injunction from Miss Madden first put her in

the way of it. In those days Miss Madden sat continually in a corner of the library reading old letters and papers. Her changed aspect Mio ascribed to the new black garments ; yet the old ones might have only accentuated the difference. Kitty McNulty, the housemaid, said it reminded her of an old man she knew at home, who lost some pound-notes out of his pocket one day coming back from a fair, and was so queer in his mind ever after that he would be picking up the dead leaves along the road, and conceiting they were bits of his notes, if he could but get them pieced together. Goodness could tell what the mistress thought to be piecing up out of those old flitters that were fit for nothing else except to light the fires ; but, unless she had some such notion, why should she spend her days and her nights over them ? They wouldn't bring the poor master back, that was certain, if she read them till the eyes dropped out of her head. In Kitty's opinion it was foolishness to be fretting yourself with the likes of them, and Miss Madden's opinion perhaps did not greatly differ ; but she had fallen under the spell of the past, and into a habit of drugging the present with memories not speedily shaken off. She had not, however, become oblivious of duties which she found herself unable to fulfil, save by delegation. Hence : " Mio," she said one morning, when the November sky was softly grey, with dim blue pools in it, and no wind to ruffle their silvery margins, " you must get the Captain down to the strand to-day. We can't expect much more of this mild weather, and he has never been there since." To both of them " since " meant the same thing, and Mio replied : " He hasn't seemed to care about going out at all since, Aunt Clemency. But I'll try to persuade him. I wish I wanted to go myself, for then I might do it better, you know."

" I think not," Miss Madden said. " You'd be doubt-

ing whether it was one word for him and two for yourself, and you're the kind of person whom that would discourage."

This was the first time that Mio had heard herself spoken of seriously as a person, and it gave her a feeling of responsibility, which in some people would have been importance.

So when she had read the newspaper to Captain Delaney, who feared, not groundlessly, that she saw how little he was interested, she made her promised attempt, with at the outset small success. Captain Delaney could hear the tide coming in clearly enough, from where he was—namely, the room that looked seaward; for he still shunned the library, haunted and deserted. He thought there would soon be a shower, as the wind had a rainy sound. Against this Mio had not the heart to urge that the sun was just then burning a golden hole through filmy sheets of milk-white fire, and that a ray had begun to steal over the carpet at his feet. He would wait, at any rate, until after the post had come, a very variable time, which Mio well knew would probably be late enough to make going out before luncheon most plausibly not worth while. In fact, her efforts would, in all likelihood, have failed, had it not been for the co-operation of Larry Fahy, who, coming in with a message, took the opportunity to remark that they weren't apt to get the likes of such another claspy-medal day this side of Shrove. The sea was slipping in as soft as buttermilk out of a churn—and then added in an aside to the Captain that he hoped his Honour was about taking Miss Mio down to the strand, for she hadn't had e'er a bit of a walk this long time back, and looked as if it would do her a sight of good.

Soon after that the small party set forth, and Larry saw to the arrangement of a sheltered camping-place

in the eye of the sun, before he returned to the house, whence he said that he would make it his business to fetch the letters, supposing e'er a one came by the post-man. "Belike I'll find you pathrolling up and down yet, sir," he said, his tone conveying that his conjecture was a piece of advice; "for there's a firmness in the sand this day, and a warmth under your feet, that makes it mighty agreeable walking." But he was scarcely out of sight when Captain Delaney and his guide resorted to the seats prepared for them, their listless mood disposing them to find no exercise agreeable at all, and temptation in any opportunity for desisting from it. There was a certain negative pleasure in sitting idle, and only scruples of conscience on Mio's part stirred her into making a little conversation. "The people fishing in the little boat just opposite," she said, "are hardly able to move, though they've stuck their sails out all round"—her knowledge of nautical matters was strictly limited—"so that if it was a flower you might think it was overblown and falling in pieces. The wind has quite gone down."

"They'll have to take to the wooden sails," said the Captain, "as our boatman used to say, a man we had in the old days, when David and I sometimes went out sea-fishing off the Head yonder. . . . Now that he is gone, Mio, I'm within speech of uncommonly few people whom I knew before I joined the moles and bats."

"I wonder," said Mio, "whether we're all something like moles and bats compared with him?"

"Is that what you think, Mio?" Captain Delaney asked in an eager sort of way.

Mio shook her head rather sadly. "I don't think it is," she said, "but I do think it may be, and I hope so in my mind." It struck her that the Captain's expression showed disappointment at this reply, and her eyes

grew full of remorse as she watched his face ; but to seek relief by deceiving him about her views was an impossible expedient. Long since she had outgrown the terrors inspired by brimstony literature, and she had been confirmed in her unorthodox opinions by coming upon works from which she learned how far she was from standing alone as a pioneer of scepticism. Still, her outlook was vague, and she honestly admitted to herself that the hopes which fitfully brightened in it were hopes only, springing she knew not whence, though she sometimes could trace them to a strain of melody, or the magical atmosphere of a dream.

"I used to believe that I knew how he looked when he was speaking to me," said the Captain, "for I had him clear in my memory. He must have changed a bit in the last dozen years or so, of course, but not to any great extent. I can't say that now of anybody here except his sister and Larry Fahy. All the others are voices and nothing more, beyond what I conjecture from the sound of them. Yours, for instance, Mio, leads me to suppose that a very horrid object is sitting beside me."

"Oh, what sort of horridness?" Mio said, catching at the joke with alacrity. "There are so many different kinds, and I'd like very much to know which of them my voice belongs to."

"Oh, some malignant species of ogress, partly, with an element of Gorgon Medusa and a wicked old fairy—quite indescribable," said the Captain. "I say, Mio, do you remember the little chap who used to come here with Mrs. Armitage? The Sapper, we called him. I think he was about your age, or not much older."

"Alfred Armitage? Oh, yes, I remember him very well," said Mio. "You were often teaching him mathematics with figures drawn on the sand. I never could understand them when he tried to teach them to me ;

but he was very polite, and said it must be his fault for not finding the way into my mind. I always liked him. I suppose he's quite grown up by this time, for, you know, I'm getting pretty old."

"Have you ever seen him since then?" asked Captain Delaney.

"Never," said Mio. "I think he and Mrs. Armitage always live in England or abroad. But not long ago I heard Aunt Mabel telling Aunt Ethel that he was soon going to enter some military academy. I forget the name."

"Yes, he told me in his last letter," said the Captain; "he's ready to enter, but not quite old enough. At present he's in Wales with Mrs. Armitage—the Ban-a-tî, he called her."

"I remember," said Mio, "and I used to wonder why. It seemed a queer name to call his mother."

"It means 'woman-of-the-house' in Gaelic," said the Captain. "But Mrs. Armitage isn't really his mother. She adopted him because his own mother was dead."

"Like mine," said Mio. "And, of course, his father is dead, too, like mine, or they'd have stayed together."

The Captain let this inference pass without assent or dissent, but said: "I should say that he would make his way through the world very well without one. He's got plenty of brains, and seems likely to have plenty of friends. By all accounts he has everybody's good word. The more independent he is the better for him, I shouldn't wonder."

"You and he were great friends, weren't you?" said Mio. "I remember when he was staying here he always used to be in a great hurry to get down on these sands and do his Euclid with you. He liked it better than anything."

"Ah, but he'd very soon have got tired of that," said the Captain, with a confidence which Mio did not share ; but just then Larry Fahy came, bringing a letter. It was for her, and was not from Carrie, almost her only correspondent, so that its mere aspect surprised. When she had read a few lines of it, she looked at the signature, and exclaimed : "Why, it must be himself—Alfred Armitage. How queer that it should come just when we were talking about him ! And that he should write to me !"

Alfred wrote :

"Aberdwydyr Lodge, Llanfryn.

"DEAR MIO,

"You will be surprised at hearing from me, and perhaps have forgotten all about me ; but I remember you very well, and everybody at Drumatin, especially Captain Delaney. It is about him that I am writing to ask you a question, for I know that you are often staying there. Next week my friend Denis Rea and I set off to cycle from Dublin to Cork, and we shall pass quite close to Letterbrack. I should like very much, indeed, to come and see the Captain ; in fact, I have been wishing for the chance time out of mind. But I notice that when I say anything about it, the Ban-a-tî—Mrs. Armitage, you know—always throws cold water on the idea in a way that makes me think she knows it would be a nuisance to him ; not that she ever says so. I am pretty sure that he did like having me with him sometimes in the old days, and he was most awfully kind, and took no end of trouble to teach me ; but, of course, I was only a kid then, and though he may have found me a bit amusing, he might not care to be bothered with me now, and all the less as the death of Mr. Madden must have left him lonely and out of spirits. So it seems to

me that you, staying often at Drumatin, may be able to tell me whether it is likely or unlikely that he would care to see me again, and you would oblige me very much if you would let me know what you think. I daresay you could find out easily. And tell me anything about him that you can : what he does, and how he looks, and all that. If I do come, I hope that you will be there still. I don't believe that you have grown much bigger. Do you remember how Larry Fahy sometimes carried you in places where the sand was very soft and deep, because he said you might be apt to get lost in a sizeable rut ? However, I hope that I may soon see for myself. Write, please, to the St. George Hotel, Kingstown.

" Yours very sincerely,

" ALFRED ARMITAGE."

Having read this letter, Mio looked up and saw that Captain Delaney was wondering whether she had finished ; whereupon she herself fell to wondering what she should tell him about its contents. She had to decide for herself, being in reach of nobody whom she could consult ; and thus it came to pass that the injunction which sent her out of doors had far-reaching effects on her own and other people's fortunes. The decision at which she rapidly arrived was to read it aloud just as it stood. When she had done so, Captain Delaney, in his turn, meditated briefly, with a strange mixture of wistfulness and self-reproach and joy discernible on his countenance ; and he said : " Write and tell him to come at once ; a nuisance—good heavens ! I'll add a line myself, Mio. Let us be stepping in now. . . . Larry," he said, as Larry, seeing signs of a movement, came to help, " we're going to have a visit from Mrs. Armitage's little boy—big boy, I should say. We used to call him the Sapper, you remember."

"More power!" said Larry. "Himself will give a whirl round to all the wheels of the whole of us. Bedad, I well remember him. He was the makings of a fine man, and had the great notions about things. Too long away he is, but sure what matter since he'll be coming now? Grab a pig by the hind leg, and you'll have him as safe as if it was the front, so long as you don't let him run past you clever and clean."

Up at the house they learned that another guest was to be expected. This same post had brought to Miss Madden a letter from Carrie Quin. Ostensibly a letter of condolence, its concluding paragraph was, in effect, an invitation of herself to Drumatin. Carrie wrote of how gladly she would come if she would be any company to Mio, who must feel very lonely, though, of course, it was all for the best. It seemed a long time since they had had those nice walks on the strand; the sea air was always delightful; one missed it dreadfully at Craiganogue. The mention of Mio was what ensured the acceptance of Carrie by Miss Madden, who felt little concern about her pining for sea air. Mio's well-being was a different matter, a responsibility and a dimly felt desire. If it would probably be promoted by the society of that rather stupid lump of a girl, let her come by all means.

So with a strangely huge effort, Miss Madden penned a short note bidding Carrie come. The brevity of the composition prevented any unflattering incidental remarks from straying into it; not that Carrie would have been fastidious about its terms. She was too thoroughly bored at Craiganogue for any standing upon her dignity, when a chance of escape appeared. Seldom, indeed, can a girl have made her entrance into society under flatter and tamer conditions than poor Carrie was doing in her eighteenth year. More accurately she

might be said not to make it, for in the few social festivities of the neighbourhood small was her share. At this time her mother was really ill, and Flossie, long since established as housekeeper, nor in the least disposed to delegate any of her duties, gave herself, in her sister's opinion, airs of absurd importance, which would have made her an impossible companion, even if she had not been occupied by the care of the invalid, and a passion for crewel work. Unluckily for herself, Carrie had no ruling passion to put a running-string through her over-wide, floppy hours, and gather them up into a manageable succinctness; of that species she possessed nothing more to the purpose than a naturally keen desire for pleasure and amusement, which, being unaccompanied by any internal resources wherewith to satisfy it, resulted merely in giving her insipid dullness a strong flavour of discontent. One definite grievance, which had the same effect, was the increasing intimacy of her brother Gerald, nearest to her in age, with the people at the Vicarage. He was always running after that *prig* Louie Hannay, she said to herself; and hatefully in her ears sounded the brays of an accordion on which he practised tunes out of the "Church Hymnal," marked for him with blue-pencil crosses by the above-mentioned Louie, present prig, and prospective sister-in-law, in either capacity detestable. Hence did Carrie hanker after, and, indeed, help herself to, an opportunity of visiting Drumatin. She did not pitch her expectations extravagantly high. Of course, she would find them all in the dolefuls now. Even at the best of times there was very little going on about the place that anybody would like; it mostly ran to fiddles and old books, and pokling about on the shore. And poor Captain Delaney couldn't be considered a lively companion. She never could think of anything to talk to him about, and her

reading aloud he seemed rather to dislike. Some confusion of ideas led Carrie always to address Captain Delaney at the top of her voice, as if his infirmity entailed extreme hardness of hearing. Still, despite these defects, there were the vague possibilities of different surroundings; and there was Mio. Now Carrie's regard for Mio was probably her strongest sentiment, though flawed ever and anon by queer little accesses of jealousy and malice, which did not seriously interrupt its continuity. On the whole, she congratulated herself upon the presence of mind with which she had seized this pretext for suggesting a visit to Drumatin, and she set about the replenishment of her wardrobe as expeditiously as might be, not without murmuring over the slender means at her command.

Alfred Armitage was the first to arrive. He came towards the early-falling dusk of a wet November day, belated by a punctured wheel, which he had been obliged to trundle a long way through deep mud. Captain Delaney and Mio waited for him in the small, seaward-looking room. About the arrangement of it the Captain showed a concern which struck Mio as rather surprising. That the fire should be kept blazing brightly was a point on which he laid great stress, and to ensure brilliant lighting he would have an additional lamp brought in. He assured himself by touch that curtains and blinds were excluding the sight of the dismal weather which howled and splashed against the window-panes; and when he was satisfied on these heads, as well as with the preparations for tea—he insisted that a kettle should sing perpetually on the hob—he got out his silenced 'cello again, and a pile of his braille music in large clumsy sheets. Then he tuned not only his own instrument, but Mio's violin, and set her to play the gayest tunes that she knew, accompanying her himself. All through

she saw him listening for the sounds of the arrival; yet when they were heard, he would not let her stop, until steps in the passage had come quite close to the door. And as he laid down his bow, he startled and puzzled her a little by laughing unusually loud at a very mild joke of his own about scraping an acquaintance instead of a fiddle, prolonging the laugh until Larry Fahy had actually opened the door to announce Mr. Armitage. She did not guess that the Captain had planned to be thus discovered as carefully as a playwright plans an effective curtain; but so it was.

The eight years elapsed since Alfred's last visit had doubled his age, and two more at least were apparently added to it by his height joined with his general aspect and bearing, so that he looked fully eighteen. At the first sight of him Mio felt herself shrink into a very little girl, for she now had further to look up at him than in those old days, when she considered his stature altogether beyond comparison with her own; but she found him speaking to her as if they were quite on a level, and that made her feel suddenly grown up. What did the Captain think of it? she wondered. He was standing with his face turned towards the stranger's voice, and his hand held out. He, too, would almost have had to look up, if he could have looked, for tall as he was, the grizzled head scarcely escaped being overtopped by the black one. "'Tis himself that was the Sapper, sir," Larry added to his announcement, "grown beyond the recollection of anybody at all."

"Well, it's the least he could do, after staying away so long," the Captain said, as they shook hands. "If you hadn't come soon, Sapper, I suppose you would have been striking the ceiling with your sublime head."

"I'd have crawled in somehow or other, Captain," said

Alfred. "It's so uncommonly pleasant to be back again." He looked hard at his old friend, harder than he could have done if the sight had been switched on into the eyes which seemed to wait blankly just for that; and he thought that the Captain must have aged very fast to have so many unremembered white hairs and seaming wrinkles. But, on the other hand, he thought that he had hardly ever seen the Captain look so cheerful; and it did not occur to him that the expression was perhaps a rather ready-made fit, not adapting itself quite successfully to the habitual lines which it encountered. Altogether, as he took his seat by the fire, he could with perfect sincerity have repeated that he found it uncommonly pleasant.

The room was oval, a shape which he thenceforward liked in rooms, and small enough for the turf-firelight to flicker all round its pale-green walls, yet its floor unencumbered by superfluous furniture gave a sense of spaciousness. A faint aroma of blue turf-smoke was in the air; softly-shaded lamps shone clear and steady; and where most of their brightness fell, Mio had begun to fill three cerise-rimmed cups out of a very large, elaborately contorted silver tea-pot. Though actual measurements would have shown that Mio was in those days by no means tall, she did not appear to be short. The angularities of fifteen were as little discernible in her as in the unfolding of flower petals, or the curves clad by the plumage of small and slender wild birds. She was dressed in grey-linnet colour, with a knot of dark-blue ribbon at the throat, and a bit of the same tying back her hair, so duskily soft that this seemed like gathering a mist into a cloud. Its rippled flow outlining the fine contours of her small head, and ruffled silkenly about her brows, came under Alfred's eyes as he stood waiting for the Captain's cup by the tray over which

she stooped at her tea-making. He found it such an attractive object to contemplate that when she suddenly looked up, he had not time to withdraw a very steady gaze, meeting which her faint-pink, poppy flush grew vivid, and while he forgot to answer her question about sugar, she forgot that she had asked one. They were only a school-boy and a little girl; it was no more than a gleam of false dawn. Yet before it fled away they both had a moment's vision of wonderful regions lying dim on the far-off horizon, and not wholly to fade out of memory.

But in another moment they bethought them of the Captain, waiting for his tea, and more especially for his talk, a feast rich as rare, with endlessly much to ask about and tell. He might well feel that his long patience was rewarded as appropriately as if it had been a prudent precaution against "blunting the fine edge of seldom pleasure;" though, in fact, he had not practised any such self-regarding virtue. To what extent the precautions which he really had taken were proving successful he could do no more than guess. If he had known, he would have been satisfied with the result of his strategy. For, as the evening grew wilder and wetter, with the sounds of rain-laden wind, keening, weeping, like a noisy mourner shut out, the glowing room, warm and brilliant, made a more and more cheerful impression on Alfred Armitage. A weight, the heaviness of which he had never till then appreciated, was lifted off his mind by the sight of Captain Delaney ensconced in a comfortable arm-chair, eagerly and alertly asking questions, discussing the latest news, describing his various pursuits, and dwelling on the pleasure he derived from some of them, notably his 'cello. Alfred's ear for music had developed considerably since his small-boyhood, so that when the airs, interrupted by his arrival, were now rendered for his benefit on 'cello and violin, he enjoyed

them with complete sincerity ; and yet what gratified him most was the aspect of the performers themselves, so serene, so rapt, as the bows slid to and fro, weaving the gay little tunes. He wished he could have painted a picture of them, and he did carry one away with him in his mind for retrospective consolation. His old friend Larry Fahy, coming in to take away the tea-things, made another interlude. A frequent companion of the Captain's walks followed Larry, in the shape of Giant, a huge, good-natured Newfoundland, as large as a half-year-old calf, and so naively greedy, that to give him food was a thoroughgoing satisfaction. It was Larry's whim, however, to deny that the beast had any such propensity, and now while Giant swallowed tea-cake in wriggling ecstasies, he boldly affirmed that the creature had come in with no thought of eating or drinking in his mind. "What brought him along with me, your Honour, was just a notion he had to be throwing an eye over Mr. Armitage there, that's a stranger to him, though nowadays to this place, and for ought he could tell mightn't own the sort of character he'd care to have coming about you—saving your presence, sir. Of course, he's got to make his observations the best way he can."

"If he thinks as highly of me as of this cake," said Alfred, "I ought to be quite satisfied, and feel most respectable."

"Satisfied he is, sir, right enough, you may see by the cock of his ears, and he looking sideways at you all the while he was letting on to be took up with swallying them bits you were giving him," said Larry, who had himself been noting with marked approval the developments along lines which he used formerly to predict, of the small Sapper into the moral of as fine a young officer as ever planned a fortification. "I'd give a couple of

months out of every year of me life for the three of us to be setting off on some decent sort of campaign," he said to himself as he removed from the room the tea-tray and the dog, desirous of less unattainable things. "But, sure, if I can see the Captain along to the end of this blighted dark tunnel, it's the best that's to be got out of the sacrilegious old show."

It was natural enough that these circumstances and surroundings should in some degree produce an illusion in Alfred's mind. They had, indeed, been arranged with a view to throwing dust in his eyes, or, rather, say casting a glamour over what lay before them. In the reaction from the anxious and melancholy conjectures and forebodings about his old friend, which had long haunted him undivulged, he discarded them perhaps too sweepingly. As the talk and laughter and music-making went on, the very pleasantness of the firelit room helped him to forget that for one of their party it was blacker than the rayless night behind the curtained windows. He would have remembered it speedily if they had sat for a few minutes in the dark. Things being as they were, he was more light-hearted than either of his companions. For Mio could not help picturing to herself ever and anon Aunt Clemency poring over dismal old papers by a taper's blink alone in the cold and gloomy library. Once, slipping away to bring her tea and cake, she tried to allure her from that desolate place. "You would like Alfred, really, I think," Mio said. "He's quite grown up now; I don't believe I should have known who he was at all, if I had met him just walking about, but he says he would have known me anywhere. And he's amusing the Captain *grandly*."

Miss Madden only smiled rather grimly and replied: "You see, Miss Owl's-eyes, you're a little shrimp, and don't grow out of people's recollections. Run along

with yourself, and help to amuse the Captain. I'd be more a hindrance than anything else at present; but to-morrow I must re-make Alfred's acquaintance, and we'll get on all right."

Alfred was to spend his few days in Ireland at Drumatin, having without compunction abandoned Denis Rea. "He'll be among a clanjamfry of his own people at Cork, and won't miss me a bit," he said. At Drumatin in that stormy November week the household would undoubtedly have been the duller for the loss of Alfred's company. Nevertheless, all the while, in accordance with a conspiracy on the part of its members, a successful attempt was in progress to assure him that he would not be overmuch missed. Miss Madden and Mio, whom Captain Delaney had taken into his confidence, co-operated with him to this end discreetly and intelligently. Larry Fahy, who had been given no instructions, from a doubt whether he would not better them incredibly, yet carried them out, it may be said, unconsciously by his habit of enlarging on the Captain's wonderful independence, the variety of his pursuits, the liveliness of his duets with Miss Mio, and "the great diversion he took entirely" in receiving and answering letters, more particularly those that came from "yourself, sir, that was always the Sapper with him and the rest of us." The same fact was now and then suggested to Alfred quite undesignedly in a more positive sense. This happened when the accounts of his studies, listened to by the Captain with extreme interest, brought them to points where the progress of science had left the blind man so far behind that he found himself hopelessly unable to follow the explanations of his former pupil, and could not thereat conceal a little chagrin. On such occasions Alfred would feel a brief misgiving about the effect of his visit, though when he came to consider it, he could not suppose but

that its pleasures greatly outweighed its pains. He grew more adroit, too, in averting trouble of the kind. Sometimes when he perceived that it could not be otherwise warded off, he would send to Mio a beckoning glance, which she understood as a summons to come and interrupt the conversation. She never failed him, although it was an enterprise from which she shrank, setting about it with as much shyness and timidity as if she had been called upon to create a disturbance at a public meeting. Her demeanour somehow gave him a delight for which he could not account, and which was scarcely touched by his faintly stirred self-reproach for causing her embarrassment. A few years thence, his remorse would have been keener, but he was still of an inconsiderate age, capable of lop-sided pleasures. However, he bestowed and received many others; and his report was substantially true, when he wrote to Mrs. Armitage that the Captain and Mio and he were wonderfully jolly together, and that he believed everybody liked to have him there. He was uncommonly glad that he had come, and hoped that the Ban-a-ti did not mind his having done it out of his own head. That was exactly the course which had suited her, she thought, and she hoped that Captain Delaney would now sensibly withdraw his prohibition. To her own mind, it seemed hardly conceivable that after this meeting he could persevere in depriving himself of Alfred's company. "But, truth to say," she candidly admitted, "I'm as foolish about that boy as any other old woman about her pet Pom or Tom. . . . I wonder what little Mio Helveran is growing up like? She can hardly have developed into anything not pretty, so I suppose there'll soon be somebody as foolish about her—not an old woman. If she and my boy were a couple of years older, I'd think it might be he; but they're safely too young. I needn't trouble my head

about that"—for jealously troubled she would have been.

Carrie Quin, arriving two or three days after Alfred, had no special grounds at all for believing that she was a welcome addition to the party, nor did she, in fact, regard herself as such. An uncomfortable propensity was hers for obtruding herself into some position, which she coveted at a distance, but where, when she actually occupied it, she felt like a fish out of water, with no wish left save to wriggle back as soon as possible into her more appropriate element. For she was meagrely equipped with the thick-skinned conceit, which is as a panoply of complete steel to its wearer in most social emergencies. Carrie's self-satisfaction, poised in a state of instable equilibrium, was always liable to be overthrown by the merest trifles, and generally did collapse at the moments of her sorest need. So now, arrived at Drumatin, a glimpse in a dingy old mirror convinced her that her clothes were extremely unbecoming, and that she herself was a fright; and, thus discouraged, being unexpectedly confronted with a stranger youth, formidably different in appearance and manners from the few others of her acquaintance, she became alarmingly alarmed, and took refuge in a tongue-tied sulkiness calculated to cast a gloom over the gayest spirits. However, she fared better on her visit than might have been anticipated from such an unpropitious beginning. Mio, who was accustomed to her ways, had acquired some skill in extricating her from her dolorous retreats, and Alfred lent his assistance with good-nature tactfully applied. The success of their united efforts may be inferred from the fact that on the first evening at bedtime Carrie went upstairs feeling pleased with herself and her companions. In Mio's room, where she lingered for a final talk, she expressed something of this approval.

"How very handsome Alfred Armitage is," she said, "and so tall! I was quite surprised when you introduced him, for, of course, I never thought of him being grown up."

"I should not have known him, either," said Mio; "but after eight years it was not likely."

"I think he's ever so much better-looking than Mr. Tuohy that everybody makes such an awful fuss about at home," said Carrie. "Baby Hannay raves about him. And such airs as he gives himself! He hardly condescends to take off his hat when he meets us on the road. But I'm sure Alfred Armitage is twice as handsome and gentlemanly. He's different altogether from anybody one sees going about there. Just think how shabby and slouchy Jack, for instance, would look along with him."

"But I don't think anything of the kind," Mio said rather indignantly, protesting in behalf of her old friend and ally. "Jack would look all right no matter who was with him. Why, only the other day Larry Fahy was saying what a fine trooper he would make, if he went into the cavalry."

"Ooch Larry Fahy! And would you really say that *Jack* was to be compared with Alfred Armitage?" Carrie marvelled with sisterly frankness of disparagement. "Have you got eyes in your head?"

"I suppose I have one or two," said Mio. Kneeling on the hearth-rug, she had pulled the ribbon out of her hair, which fell softly in a cloud to frame her small face. She looked up with a laugh in her eyes, which had the blueness of a clear, moonlight night sky, where stars throb and flash. A sudden and violent attack of spleen unaccountably seized Carrie. "Well—you needn't roll them round and round until they drop out," she said, "not if they were ten times as big. Blue's a very *common*

colour for people's eyes, I can tell you, and not admired a bit." With that she flounced wrathfully out of the room, leaving Mio puzzled a little, but too familiar with Carrie's moods not to foresee improvement on the morrow.

CHAPTER XVII

THE day on which Mio completed her eighteenth year found her at Drumatin House, as most days of the past three years had done. They had been the pleasantest days as well as the most numerous, since at her alternative abiding place, Craiganogue, she seemed less and less to have business and desire. A lack of opportunities to do anything in particular for anybody was always felt painfully by Mio, who entertained a profound disbelief in her own value as just a companion. She was perhaps as much mistaken in her scepticism as a robin or a wren would have been in imagining that people would consider it a superfluous pest if it did not continue to weave its threads of song. Still, the fact remained that she could not see why anybody should want her merely for herself; and at Craiganogue she was often wondering rather sadly whether its inmates did. About Jack it is true she had no doubts, feeling instinctively that he always liked her to be there, and she was sure that Carrie sometimes agreed with him. But Carrie's humours were queer and capricious, and tended to become more so as time went on. There were many irritating circumstances to stir them up, Mio thought, as she listened sympathetically to Carrie's complaints and grumbles. Chiefly they concerned Gerald

and his growing devotion to the Hannays, more particularly Louie the prig. To this source Carrie traced some annoyances which did obviously spring from it, and others connected in ways which were not apparent without explanation.

One Sunday morning, for instance, when dressing for church, she uttered a lamentation over the deficiencies of her wardrobe, ending resentfully with: "And I was as near as anything to having a lovely set of trimming ready for me this spring, if it hadn't been for those odious Hannays, and the moths in the vestry, that the stupid idiots could have got rid of as easily as possible with some sort of stuff, if they had chosen to take the trouble." Then, Mio looking puzzled, she explained: "You see, Mio, Mother had promised to work me a sweet pattern of wild-roses and forget-me-nots, and had actually begun it, when the Hannays set up a yawp about some abominable woolwork hassock-covers that they had stowed away in the vestry, and wanted to get stuffed for Easter. Instead of which, the moths got into the wool, and ate it all into holes. So that meddling creature, Louie Hannay, persuaded Gerald, and he went and bothered mother and Flossie until he got them to set to work slaving at new ones. You'd have thought everybody's lives depended on their being finished in time. And they were the most hideous things you ever beheld: a pattern all over queer animals, that might have come out of Noah's Ark—pelicans and lions and pigeons and eagles and snakes, and a lamb standing on three legs with a little flag tucked under the fourth. But Gerald says they're symbolical emblems, and nearly has a fit if one laughs at them; it's so irreverent! Of course, it's all Miss Louie Hannay. Much he'd care about anything of the sort only for that. However, there was an end of my unfortunate trimming."

"You might work yourself some, and have it ready for next spring," Mio suggested.

"I might; but my embroidery always gets into messes," Carrie said gloomily. "Just now I'm knitting a coarse cotton quilt, that's very cheap and warm, for some people named Rooney living down Millers Lane; Dr. Fitzsimon says that they've got nothing except old sacks by way of bed-clothes."

"Is he the new dispensary doctor?" said Mio.

"Not so very new, considering that he's been here nearly ten months," said Carrie. "I'm sure I told you when I wrote. You wouldn't like him at all, for he hates music. He says he'd sooner listen to a couple of old cats swearing at one another in the yard, any day. He's most amusing. And he's so good to the poor." This phrase caught Mio's somewhat desultory attention with something dearly familiar, which she failed quite immediately to identify. After a moment's reflection the name "Harriet Smith" floated across her mind, forthwith transporting her into the blissful scenes of "Emma," where she had early begun to find solace. But Carrie continued her statement of grievances: "The whole pack of them are an awful nuisance, to me, at all events. It doesn't matter much to father and Jack, who are generally out; but they seem to be always under my feet wherever I go. In the drawing-room they're gabbling about Church-work, and in the school-room Gerald's as often as not thumping hymn tunes and chants on the piano, or dragging them out of his vile old accordion. Sometimes I wish we hadn't given up going to Feristown Church; but the roan mare had grown so slow that we took half the day getting there; and I suppose Gerald would have run after the Hannays all the same. Do you remember how frightened you used to be at poor Dinny the Jigger? You thought nobody

knew, but I saw you edging away from him. It was dull enough in those days, goodness knows, and it's worse now that mother and Flossie won't go to anything except mothers' meetings and missionary sales. Dr. Fitzsimon calls it religious dissipation. Well, I must fly, or I'll be late. I'm sure I don't wonder that you'd rather be at Drumatin. Do you ever hear from Alfred Armitage? You must tell me when I come back."

Though a little shocked by Carrie's point-blank assertion of it, Mio could not truthfully have denied her preference for Drumatin. From Craiganogue, with its atmosphere of bored discontent, stirred by gusts of domestic worry and less frequent deadly-liveliness, Mio was wont to depart, feeling small regret for anything left behind there, save her Cousin Jack, the unsuspected purloiner of her most valuable property, and a tame robin, that would flit and hop about after her, more for company than for crumbs. But on this clear-skied October anniversary, she was thinking of them all in no critical spirit. The morning post had brought her letters with good wishes and little gifts; and these seemed to shed round the place whence they had come a softening haze, touched here and there with golden light. As she sat alone at her breakfast, the opened envelopes and wrappers, with their contents, strewn about her cup and plate, awakened many reminiscences. Especially did a "Mansfield Park," sent jointly by her Aunt Ethel and Uncle Charlie, revive her feelings of delighted gratitude at his gift of her beloved violin, all those long years ago. Less kindly disposed towards her she had thought him of late, and had thought rightly, in so far as a certain uneasiness of conscience did incline him to keep aloof from her, disagreeable associations being increased by the fact that she was the subject of the nearest approach

to a serious quarrel that had ever arisen between him and his son Jack. That his proceedings should be adversely judged by Jack, his faithful admirer from two feet high to six feet odd, was a novel experience, the unpleasantness of which he tried to counteract by pronouncing Jack a self-opinionated young ass, and, more successfully, by shunning anything likely to remind him of their difference. Hence his misinterpreted avoidance of his niece. But now Mio, casting the bookworm's practised glance over the pages of this new possession, looked forward with unalloyed pleasure to coming hours spent in the society of thrifty Mrs. Norris, and rejoiced at the kindness of her uncle and aunt. At the same time so defective was her sense of proportion that one floral card, inscribed with a brief line, and bearing on its envelope the Woolwich postmark, seemed to her the central sun about which the events of that day revolved, and from which they would have received radiance to reflect, even if they had possessed none of their own.

By and by she went upstairs to see Miss Madden, who was kept in her own room by an attack of sciatica. Mio found her huddled close to the fire, a figure which would have looked forlorn had not its attitude been expectant. "So here is a very venerable dame," she said, when the person she had been waiting for came in. "Aren't you rather late, Miss Mio?"

"Mrs. Toole made such excellent flour-cakes this morning that perhaps I was greedier and longer than usual at breakfast, Aunt Clemency," said Mio, not quite consciously untruthful, for she really did not guess how many minutes she had spent in gazing at a painted spray of woodbine and traveller's-joy.

Then Miss Madden produced a long-shaped, leathern, satin-lined case, which disclosed rows of pearls, beads that might have been turned out of hail-stones, or blown

into bubbles from frosted foam ; things of the frail and fleeting beauty, which becomes of great price when it takes on a durable form. The necklace suited Mio right well, Miss Madden thought, even though tried on with the disadvantage of a high-necked cloth bodice. " But, to my mind," she said, " pearls look better in dark hair than anywhere else. You see, these are made up so that they can be worn so. I shall expect you to twist them in and out of those black wisps at least on your wedding day."

Mio shook her head, which nowadays was wound closely round with thick silken coils, as sleek as a black-bird's wing ; and as she shook it, slowly and gravely, " Oh, Aunt Clemency," she said, " I think I'll never have a wedding day at all."

" Of course, my dear child," Miss Madden said, laughing a little. " You wouldn't be likely to think anything else. But, all the same, when the sun rises on it, you'll know full well that you couldn't spend it more happily than in being married."

" I didn't say that I'd never like it," said Mio, " only that it would never happen, I thought. Things that one likes may always keep ever so far off, you know, as the sunset does, with the wide sea between you and it." She stopped abruptly and laughed a little, too. " But I'll wear those pearls in my hair this very evening, just for vanity, and be as set up as if I hadn't left the Queen of Sheba a crooked pin to her name, as old Mrs. Lee used to say, when the nursery-maid appeared in particularly fine clothes."

" Oh ! " Miss Madden said, and meditated for a while. " You would have had these, anyhow, before very long," she resumed. " I've left them to you in my will, with all my other bits of things. None of them of much account, I'm afraid. There's the piano, of course ; it was a good

one, but it's seen its best days, like other people. Your Cousin Jack Quin is my executor. I appointed him along with David, not thinking that he would ever be called upon to act alone, for David was half a dozen years younger than I. However, he'll do very well, I'm sure, and settle everything for you, Mio."

"Yes, yes," said Mio. "But not for years and years yet. One needn't mind about wills, need one? There isn't anything the matter with you, is there, Aunt Clemency?" Her eyes were wide with alarm, and she was saying to herself: "Are all my old people going away?"

"Dear me, no, nothing bad or good," said Miss Madden. "You needn't look, Miss Owl's-Eyes, as if you expected to see me suddenly 'make a vanishing,' like the goddess in the temple; only mine would be once for all with no reappearances. But people make their wills when they are in the rudest health; that is to say, if they care about making them at all, for nobody knows what may happen—luckily, I daresay. I wish that somebody had written an essay on the 'Inconvenience of Foreseeing'—somebody, I mean, in the days when essays were read. These times the editor of some halfpenny paper might start the subject as a correspondence to fill his columns gratuitously with the opinions of any zanies who would risk a penny stamp on the chance of seeing their inanities in print. Away with them all, says I. That's becoming one of my customary greetings, I'm afraid, and it certainly isn't civil. But it has the merits of summarizing one's wishes comprehensively, though I'm not sure that 'away with me' wouldn't be a more rational formula. You see, my dear, half the things that people grumble about, they could easily avoid if they chose. 'Here's out of it,' David used to say, and it's often a very judicious motto to act on.

What a pretty card you have there ; the colour of the honeysuckle is excellent. Where did it come from ? ”

Thus she diverted Mio's mind from premature forebodings, and they talked long, cheerfully and discursively. But she could not divert the course of the unfortunate events, which were even then bound for Drumatin House. That same post brought to Captain Delaney a disquieting report of the company in which all his fortune was invested ; and before he had time to sell out at howsoever great a sacrifice, the whole concern collapsed, leaving him with no resources except his pension. As this barely sufficed for the maintenance of a single able-bodied man, the loss reduced him from being the most affluent member of the Drumatin household to the position of one who could no more than just pay his way ; and, his infirmity considered, threatened him with many difficulties and privations, were he obliged to quit that establishment. It was a serious blow, despoiling his present, and likely enough to devastate his future. He could not well forbear to consider it deeply and gloomily, though his meditations were by no means all sordid and selfish. What aggrieved him most immediately was that he would no longer possess the means of aiding at an emergency, or providing things pleasant but superfluous, which in moments of despondency he regarded as his one poor claim not to feel himself, and be felt by others, sheerly burdensome. The best he could hope for now was the ability to keep his own head, financially, above water, without risk of submerging anybody else. When he looked forward, he perceived only too clearly how imminent might become the danger of such a failure to keep afloat. From this point of view he reflected with alarm on how much it cost to make life seem at all endurable to him, and he

reproached himself with having fallen more than need was into habits of luxury.

A result of this was that one rimy December morning Mio, coming into the Captain's sitting-room, found his grate black, and himself perished of aspect as he explained how much too mild he thought it for a fire. Against her arguments of the thermometer and the frost, he counter-argued that the thermometer was an untrustworthy one, and that the frost was dew. But when confronted with a rime-roughened ivy leaf, gathered through the window, he shifted his ground from objective to subjective, and declared that he felt quite warm enough. Knowing the state of his affairs, and having already observed a few smaller incidents tending the same way, Mio would have descried his motive even if she had not met with Larry Fahy, lying in wait for her in the passage, to lay before her certain griefs and perplexities.

" Beg pardon, Miss Mio, but I hope you're after persuading the Captain to let you put a match to the fire within there. He wouldn't be said by me, but he might likely be more conformable to reason with you. He would not? Well, all I can say is that he's doing what he's no right to be doing, and no call, stinting himself out of his bit of warmth and comfort, when peat's there in great armfuls, nearly for the asking. If Miss Madden was about and around as usual, I well know she wouldn't give her countenance to any such obvidious regulations; for to stinge hasn't ever been her way, I'll say that for her. But things are gone beyond my contending with, now that the Captain's set his face against listening to reason; and he's forbid me ordering him his bit of tobacco, and cut off his glass of porter at luncheon; heart-scalded he has me, and the mischief knows what he'll be contriving next. To be sure, it's that blamed old railway com-

pany bursting up on him is at the bottom of the whole thing, and the devil's cure to it, begging your pardon, Miss Mio, for passing the remark ; but I could find it in my heart to say a deal more than that, if it was any good."

Larry and Mio parted, both much chagrined by these measures of economy, which it was not in their power to prevent. The situation seemed all the more puzzling to Mio, because she had noticed for some time past that Miss Madden also had developed a propensity for saving, in small unpractical ways it was true, still evidently with design. Pondering on these things, Mio concluded that she herself should take some action in the matter, and at last, much doubting, wrote to her Cousin Jack :

" Drumatin House,

" Letterbrack,

" December 9th.

" DEAR JACK,

" Would you mind telling me, what I do not much like to ask, because it seems rather 'having,' whether there is some money of mine that could be paid to me now as an income. I think you said there was some. The reason why I should like it is that Captain Delaney has lost most of his in a railway company, and since then he will go on trying to cost as little as possible, and he will not let anybody get him what he really wants. Aunt Clemency's rheumatism keeps her upstairs still, and he does not mind Larry Fahy or me. He will not smoke his pipe, or have an egg at his breakfast, or even a fire in his room ; and it is dreadful to think of his sitting there in the cold and dark. Poor Larry goes about looking like a person haunted by the ghost of a bad tooth-ache. I wish the Captain could see his face. But it seems to me that if I were living on means of my

own, I might find it easier to insist on getting the things that he ought to have, and to give orders, and manage generally. So I have written to you, and you must forgive me if I am a great plague as well as your affectionate cousin,

“Mio.”

Reading this letter, as he sat in a flicker of wintry sunshine on a field-gate, where a rushy slope fell away at his feet to a brown bog-corner, Jack's first thought was a sincere self-congratulation on those successful dealings of his with Mio's Strad. For the proceeds of them, swelled by the investment of five years' interest, now enabled him at once to comply with her request. Next he blamed himself for having left her to make it, instead of having long since considered about the expediency of some such arrangement. Then he bestowed earnest thought on the query whether it were a temptation or a duty to start at once for Drumatin, and see how matters stood there. He had not seen Mio since Easter, and only for about half an hour, and only, so to speak, as a spectator. This was how it had happened. Mrs. Armitage and Alfred had very briefly visited Letterbrack in the holidays, and had carried off Mio for a long day's motor drive, the wide-flung curve of which at its furthest point swept to within a few miles of Craiganogue. Thereabouts they fell in with Jack Quin, on his way home from tramping after rabbits over Knockoona deep in furze, and offered him a restful lift. So he sat for a while by Mrs. Armitage behind his cousin and Alfred, who was driving. The lengths of the grey road-ribbon were swiftly rolled up with great ease of body for the driven; yet it may be doubted whether tediously trudging them afoot, Jack would not have, on the whole, found more repose. Of mind he certainly would. For the

conversation which he had to maintain, more or less intermittently, with Mrs. Armitage—she found her lion's share of it rather a heavy weight—could not distract him from observing that other one which was carried on out of earshot but within sight. There was more, indeed, to be seen than heard, as Alfred's attention to his steering-wheel did not permit much continuous talk. "To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit," and, fine or no, Jack's wit inferred this fact: That in Mio's eyes he must expect always to remain just a member of the Craiganogue cousinhood; one of them who could sometimes—if he had luck—give her a helping hand, because he was so much bigger and older than herself. And thence he drew the conclusion that he would be wise to put certain notions out of his head and keep them out. It was a process in which he had had considerable practice, as such had been the end of most things whercon he had at any time set his wishes. Now, in this latest instance, he clearly perceived, as he sat perched atop of the gate, that in keeping them out he would probably not be aided by a visit to Drumatin. But suppose that it would be to Mio's advantage? She might be in a real difficulty, and want advice, even if it were no better than he could offer, as much as money. Perhaps she would like to come home with him. On the contrary, perhaps his arrival would be a nuisance. On the contrary side, also, stood the petty, vexatious obstacle of his finances being at such a low ebb that he could not, without substantial inconvenience, contrive to afford the price of his third-class return ticket. However, his last thought, as he dropped to his feet, was: "Perhaps I'll bring her home."

He went on thinking so at intervals during his night-journey, which was too cold for sleep. Through the rattling carriage windows pierced many a shrewd thrust

of ice-edged airs, and at dawn began to glimmer small snow-wreaths that had sifted in. And snow was falling still, on the forenoon a few posts after she had venturously written, when Mio deseried her Cousin Jack hurrying with clogged soles to the hall door. Glad she was to see him, and almost awe-stricken when he produced a big envelope containing thirty pounds in bank-notes, a sum which he said she would receive quarterly, or a larger one if she wanted it. Barely three-quarters of an hour for inquiries and explanations were allowed him by the awkwardly-timed train, which he must catch, as he could not demand lodging at Drumatin, and had not a penny to pay a hotel bill. Into this meagre space he managed, however, to compress investigations, which assured him that nothing was seriously amiss in the household, and an interview with Captain Delaney, whom he left in improved spirits, his farewell words to Jack being a peremptory injunction not to carry off Mio.

Jack made for the opening; it was his very last chance, for Mio had accompanied him to the hall door, and beyond it into the wind-swept porch, so near had he come to departing with his main purpose unfulfilled.

"Do you know, Mio, I wish I could disobey the Captain's orders," he said. "It's lonesome over there at Craiganogue when you're so long away."

"You see, the people here have really wanted me," said Mio, "and I couldn't well leave them. But I'll be coming back for a while by and by."

"It's a ruinous old shanty as it is now," said Jack. "But things are bound to be better one of these days, and then we'll get the place set to rights and be altogether much more civilized. And perhaps you might be content to live there, Mio. You used to like some things, I think—our walks over the bog, and fishing

along Almody River. You might have a nice little beast, too, and ride. I remember putting you up on an old Shetland we had, when you weren't the size of a kitten, and you had quite a notion of sticking on. What would you think, Mio?"

"I think," said Mio, "I couldn't like to go away, so that there would never be anybody here except Aunt Clemency and the Captain."

"But they might find someone else to stay with them, you know," said Jack. "And, Mio, suppose there was somebody that you thought more of than of them—somebody who thought more of you than of anything else in the world? There *might* be such a person some time or other, mightn't there?"

Mio shook her head. "Not at——" she began and broke off suddenly.

"Craiganoguc," Jack finished for her, watching her ruefully and intently.

Mio nodded quickly, and then with a swifter flush: "Or *anywhere*," she cried, "anywhere *at all*, you know."

"Of course I know," he said. "Never mind, Mio. I just thought I would ask. And I'll always be there, if you want me. But now I must run, for this unhandy old train won't be so accommodating."

"Oh, Jack, it was so dreadfully good of you to come that horrid, long, cold journey—and you're going off without a bit of luncheon or anything! It's too bad!" said Mio very remorsefully. "Just look how it's snowing! You'll be wet through before you get to the station. Didn't you bring an overcoat?"

"The Governor had borrowed mine; he's gone to Dublin. Never mind, little Mio," Jack repeated, "I'm all right. But you mustn't stand in this draught. I declare there's quite a large flake sitting on your eye-

lashes. Run indoors, my dear, and take care of yourself, and write very soon."

He ran down the slippery steps, only pausing to pat Giant, who was grinning and wagging at the top, and Mio watched him plodding out of sight down the deepening white of the avenue, with his hands in the pockets of his shabby country-made coat. She had never been sorrier to see anybody go. "Oh, I *wish* he didn't wish it," she said to herself, "but I know he does. Dear old Jack, and I can't do a thing for him, not a thing. I daresay he'll catch his death of cold besides." Sorrowfully she went indoors, and hastened to shut up the big envelope with its wondrous store of wealth in a drawer. She could not bear to think of it. Indeed, for the rest of that day she found thinking full of thorns, because every thought seemed to be caught and stabbed through by the ache in her heart.

When Jack got home in the sleety dark, he found himself confronted by a troublesome piece of business. His father wrote from Dublin that the long-pending sale of the southern estate had at last been accomplished; and then, with a sudden promptness, surprising after interminable delay, the money was paid over and the transaction concluded. Now, therefore, the task which awaited Jack was that of getting his Cousin Mio's affairs securely and equitably arranged. He did not expect to achieve this without encountering much of what he himself described as "a plaguy sort of bother," but he knew that such an opportunity of doing it on any terms could not recur, and he had more than ever set his heart on rendering her this unromantic service. The difficulties with which he had to contend were elusive, pervasive and patience-trying in a high degree, being chiefly his father's preference for slipshod business methods, his habit of basing calculations on hopes rather than facts,

and his constant desire to claim omittance as a quittance. No one could easily describe Charlie Quin's attitude towards such matters, and its results, without seeming to accuse him of more deliberately dishonest purposes than he had at any time entertained. Anxiety to avoid this, coupled with the necessity of strongly urging disagreeable steps, made a situation which called for much tact and judgment, qualities not over liberally bestowed upon Jack. Others, however, may in the upshot have stood him in better stead.

"Paying up all that money now according to that tom-fool plan of yours would leave us uncommonly short, I can tell you," Charlie Quin grumbled for perhaps the dozenth time, as they discussed the subject one evening after dinner.

Jack repeated his conviction that there would be quite enough to keep his mother and the girls comfortably; that Gerald would soon be a full-blown curate, able to do for himself; that Fred, in Canada, had already had a fair share, and out there could, at worst, always find work; and that he himself would get along finely, no fear. "I need never starve," he said, "as long as I have my gun."

"And you could clothe yourself in rabbit-skins, I suppose," his father said ironically.

"I might, if it lay between that and the simpler costume adopted by some of our statuary out there," said Jack. "As a last resource, what would you say to collecting them, and setting up as a plaster-work Madame Tussaud? I'm afraid the patronage of this neighbourhood would hardly be lucrative."

His feeble little joke drew down retribution on him, for his father, judging by the facetious tone which it introduced, that a true word might opportunely be spoken in jest, replied: "It hardly would. But, I say, have

you ever further considered that other more rational plan that I suggested to you long ago—about you and that little cousin of yours? Upon my word, the last time she was staying here it struck me that you had some such idea in your head, and, if so, you've certainly been considering it quite long enough."

Jack, who had been hoping against hope that the subject might not crop up, thought that he would most speedily escape from it by keeping to the jocular view. "Long enough you might call it, by Jove! if there was anything to consider," he said. "Little Mio? Why, I'm ages too old, supposing there was nothing else." It was true that within the last few days he had grown to feel older with strange rapidity, as if a door had silently swung to between him and his youth. "No, I must stick to my gun and the rabbits, if not their skins."

But his father had no intention of returning to the rabbits so quickly. "Too old! What rot!" he said, subsiding at once into indignant seriousness. "Why, I believe you're scarcely seven-and-twenty yet. I know there aren't ten years between your ages—not a day too much difference, on the right side. That's just stuff and nonsense, my good fellow, and you may depend on it she wouldn't take such a view any more than I do. Girls don't want to be bothered with boys just out of school, and, undoubtedly, Miss Mio didn't appear at all to dislike your society. Age, indeed! You needn't let that stand in your way for a moment, I assure you."

"Ah, but the way's blocked, Dad," said Jack. "It's a case of no thoroughfare. She's not for me, or the likes of me, and small blame to her. You see, I may be young in years, but I'm old in villainy," he said, laughing; "that is to say, in steering about doing nothing rational from one day's end to the other. However,

when we've got this business fixed up, I intend to turn over a new leaf, and begin some sort of work. There's lots to be done about the place. I believe that Joey Quigley and I between us could make a job of draining the rushy end of Little Furzes, so that something could be got out of it—a crop of mangolds perhaps to start with——”

Into further details of this drainage scheme Charlie Quin did not refuse to follow his son, though with but divided attention. He was thinking in his own mind : “ Well, if she's not for the likes of him, she's not for the likes of an uncommonly good sort, let me tell her.” And next day Jack discovered, much to his surprise, that a very marked change had come over his father's business methods. He was now willing and zealous to admit and discharge all his liabilities to his ward, and he promptly took steps to invest in unimpeachable securities the utmost farthing due. The prosaic event afforded vast relief to Jack, who, left little wealthier than any lords of their own hands, was far better pleased than if he had inherited a princely fortune. Some self-reproach, it is true, alloyed his pleasure ; for he began to think that he had been guilty of rash judgments and baseless suspicions in criticizing his father. Still, that shifting of censure lifted an immense weight off his mind.

Unaware of how her interests had been safeguarded at Craiganoguc, Mio was meanwhile living through greyish days at Drumatin. If days were likened to the webs of shuttleless spinners, some might be said to ripple freely on the sunny air, shimmering iridescent gleams, and others to bide fixed in gloomy recesses, hodden-grey and dust-grimed, with often a hideous shape lurking in a corner. Mio's days were not as bad as that, but rather of an intermediate type, with little enough resemblance

to the waving, many-coloured gossamer threads and sparkling wheels diamonded with dew. No striking events followed Jack's visit, the remembrance of which continued long to sadden her. The funds which he had furnished did to some extent assist her and Larry Fahy in obstructing Captain Delaney's measures of economy; but Miss Madden's intervention in the matter was ultimately of more avail. For, learning the state of affairs, she went one cold morning to his room, where she found him sitting by a compromise in the shape of a heavily-slacked fire, which kept its heat to itself as a dead secret. "Lambert Delaney," she said to him sternly, "you are a perverse and irrational man, sitting there half frozen for want of a poke. Can you tell me how, when you have starved and perished yourself and your pension to death, I'm to get along at all? We manage very well now, but then it would be quite different. Of course, if it was only yourself, it would be one thing; but a pension's a serious responsibility, especially when it stands between a venerable spinster and straitened circumstances, not to say actual penury. You have no right to risk it, as I'm sure you must be aware. And I'm going to make you up a decent fire. Only for the honour and glory of it, you might as well have none as that black thing." With a few poker-thrusts she broke through the murky crust, and in a moment converted the hoarding miser into a flaunting spendthrift of flame. The blaze slickered out into the room, so that the Captain felt it warm on his face and hands. It was, for the time being at least, an argument against the super-simple life stronger than even Miss Madden's studiously unemotional insistence upon the duty of continuing to survive, though that had not been without effect. As she swept up the hearth, she casually remarked that early in the New Year business would bring her to

Dublin, when she would take the opportunity of having a will drawn up by Messrs. Purdon and Scott, the solicitors. "Home-made wills are often a failure, I believe," she said, "and I'm conscious of knowing just enough about law to misapply legal terms. I was under the impression that David had settled about this place going to you, when the last of us flitted; but Mr. Purdon tells me that this has not been done, and that as things stand, Gilbert Hill-Clarke would succeed to it. Truth to say, rather than that I'd set a match to it, and watch it all flare up like this fire. He's underhand and grasping, and his wife is much the same. So I'll be glad to have it arranged, and imagine no obnoxious occupants of poor old Drumatin. You, of course, can hand it on afterwards to anybody you like, suppose, for instance, that good-looking boy." Thereupon she recollected Mio's presence, and between them they persuaded the Captain to have out his 'cello, neglected of late, and begin a duet. Miss Madden left them in the fire-lit room playing a fairylike "Herd-girl's Dream." Since her brother had ceased to be a performer, she had not listened to music, and the lid of her piano was lifted only for dusting and tuning.

Then the wintry weeks lagged by past Christmas, and on into the New Year. They brought few events, and fewer still that were of much interest. These comprised infrequent letters from Mrs. Armitage, which reported Alfred to be working tremendously hard, and told of a sword of honour, medals, and other distinctions. Mio read the list aloud to Captain Delaney as often as she dared, but not very often, being deterred by two unfounded fears. News of a holiday in Paris came, too, along with pretty things, including a big box of bonbons. Some mortification was Mio's as she owned to herself that the disappearance of the last one did

cause a certain sense of blankness and loneliness. She feared that she must have grown disgracefully greedy.

Winter was on the verge of spring when Miss Madden's expedition to Dublin actually took place. She set forth on a morning of veiled sunbeams; the mist they glimmered through was so blossom-white, that when it lifted off the blackthorn hedges, some of it seemed to have been caught on the snaggy twigs. Mio parted from her at the front gate, where Christy Redahan's pony-trap picked her up for conveyance to the station. As she drove away, Larry Fahy, who had carried down her bag, observed that Miss Madden had the appearance somehow as if this winter was after putting too thin an edge on her altogether, and he thought the bit of a jaunt to Dublin would be apt to benefit her finely. But it seemed to Mio that she looked more than usually cheerful, as she sat up gaunt and tall in the small governess-car, and twirled her raised umbrella-handle for a farewell greeting.

Along the avenue blackbirds were fluting in among boughs evergreen and bare, and the wash of a tide below on the strand sounded like the rustling of innumerable leaves to come, faint and far-off. Turning back by herself, Mio felt rather lonesome, and important, and uneasy, a feeling which grew stronger with the lengthening of Miss Madden's absence. It might have lessened with use, had not her cares presently been increased by Larry's inopportunately falling ill. A three-mile walk through heavy rain to meet an old comrade, and an imprudent session in wet clothes, which dried on him, only to be drenched again on his homeward way, led him almost over the brink of rheumatic fever, and imprisoned him, helplessly crippled, in bed. Hence followed the installation of an hospital nurse, whose requirements were bewildering and expensive, a general upsetting of the household, and a period of sad loss and

discomfort to the Captain. Worries and perplexities thickened round Mio, for whom time seemed to pass slowly on purpose that every hour might have leisure to concoct some new annoyance. Through all her trouble blew a bitter north-east wind, in which they throve; and at every post-time the English letter she hoped for was not to be seen. Then at last, when she was thinking wistfully that Aunt Clemency must now surely very soon write fixing the date of her return, the news came that she would never do so; for she had instead died suddenly in a Dublin nursing-home.

CHAPTER XVIII

VI HILL-CLARKE was ready to cry with vexation as she sat in a capacious arm-chair, which she filled fairly well. She looked fat and old for her fewer than thirty years, and excessively cross, too; moreover, she felt quite as cross as she looked. This frame of mind might have been considered rather surprising, inasmuch as she had just taken possession of a piece of property, long desired, about which she had often doubted and desponded. For though she and her husband saw most clearly how monstrously Miss Madden would be to blame if she left it to anyone else, their prospects remained during her lifetime uncertainly obscure. And after her death they learned that their fears had not been unfounded; they had, in fact, come very near realization. In Dublin she had instructed her solicitors to draw up her will, which they had promised to do with dispatch. But the clerk entrusted with the drafting of it spent a Saturday afternoon at the Baldoyle Races, where he won five pounds, and celebrated the success with festivities so profuse, that a severe cold kept him away from the office for two days. Coinciding with a pressure of work before Easter, this short-handedness caused a delay in Miss Madden's business. Thus, accidentally, it happened that at the time when sudden heart failure came on her in the home where she was

staying for an operation, her last wishes still existed only in the form of written memoranda, legally of no effect.

"And an uncommonly good job it was for us, too," Mr. Hill-Clarke reported to his wife. "If the precious document had been executed, not a sou we'd have got. The crazy old idiot—well, as she's gone, we may say *nil nisi*—but the poor old creature had left the place and everything to that blind fellow they had living there, and her personal property—jewellery and all that, you know—to that little minx of a cousin of yours, Mio. What-d'-you-call-her."

"Nasty little wretch," said Vi. "Fancy, her going about wearing my pearls! Certainly we had a narrow escape, but I suppose it's all right now."

This sense of security made her chagrin the more poignant when on the very day of her arrival at Drumatin House, Messrs. Purdon and Scott's confidential clerk, who had come down to see about things, found in Miss Madden's desk the perfectly valid will, by which she did bequeath all her personal property to Mio. Bitter, indeed, was Vi's disappointment. She had been looking forward to a prolonged, delightful rummage through drawers and presses and boxes, unearthing, who could tell what hidden treasures; and now she was not to have a thing, but would see it all packed off to that odious, scheming brat, who should never have been let worm herself into the house. Vainly Mr. Hill-Clarke, who naturally cared less about the matter, sought to appease her by a well-timed rejoinder of how lucky they were that nothing else had been made away with. *She* couldn't see what there was lucky in being cheated out of things that belonged to them; but, of course, *he* might like it. Secretly she thought that he was somehow to blame. It was hardly believable that he couldn't have done something if he had taken the trouble.

Jack's executorship was a circumstance which she found additionally annoying, and in this her husband agreed with her. That affair of the Strad had left him filled with rancour against the person whom he regarded as having got the better of him in making a very good thing out of it. Mr. Davidson had apprised him of the millionaire Vanlink's purchase of a violin, undoubtedly the one purloined by that young thief, who probably before now had made ducks and drakes, in more or less disreputable ways, of his ill-gotten gains. Mr. Hill-Clarke sincerely regretted that owing to the peculiar circumstances attending the removal of the instrument, he could not openly tax Jack Quin with its misappropriation, or even without risk of awkwardness refer tauntingly to the subject, which would have been a relief. Discreetly, Vi had been left in ignorance of the transaction, but ample grounds for resentment now were hers in what she considered Jack's unbrotherly attitude. Having come also on business, he sided with the meddlesome solicitor's clerk, who suggested that two responsible persons, say himself and Mr. Quin, should make an inventory of Miss Helveran's legacy, and see everything packed up ready to go along with her. And he actually had the impudence to put seals on doors and drawers. Really, Vi thought Jack might have considered her, to say nothing of Chippie and Chappie, and Babs, and Gibs, and Violetta, his own nephews and nieces, more than *Mio*, who was only just an interloper, with a knack of getting round people. In exactly what way Jack's proceedings conflicted with her own and her children's interests she did not say even to herself; but she had at the back of her mind the baulked sense of having been excluded from an opportunity.

Once, goaded by a pricking remembrance of that moment in the hotel coffee-room, when Mr. Davidson

and he had looked foolish at each other over the case of the vanished violin, Mr. Hill-Clarke plunged into innuendo: "You ought to look better after your property—or other people's—on your way home this time. It might be carried off to Cork, accidentally, you know, and never find its way back again."

Jack, who was writing a letter, looked up startled—indeed, astounded—at such inexplicable effrontery. He had himself been sedulously keeping aloof from anything likely to revive reminiscences which would presumably embarrass the Strad's baffled kidnapper. But as this solicitude now seemed unnecessary, he replied in plain terms: "It went to the United States, I believe, if you mean my cousin's old violin. And very luckily for her. One way or the other it had been near going to loss."

"Very lucky for the young lady that she has such a zealous guardian and agent," Mr. Hill-Clarke said.

"I'm neither one nor the other, as it happens," said Jack.

"Temporarily self-constituted on occasion, though," Mr. Hill-Clarke said, casting about under difficulties for a retort.

"A sort of special constable," said Jack, who, on the contrary, was endeavouring not to say the first thing that occurred to him, and in this instance failed.

"What about violins?" Vi inquired, pricking up her ears. "Cousin David's belong to us."

"Oh, only some things of Mio's," said Jack.

"I suppose she'll soon be ready to go *now*," Vi said, so emphasizing the last word as to convey that the six days elapsed since the funeral formed a geological period. "It will be a comfort to get rid of all that old rubbish, and have room to turn round in in one's own presses and drawers."

Mio was returning to Craiganogue as soon as might be, waiting only until Captain Delaney's affairs were settled, and indifferent about her destination, because for the time she could hardly detach her mind from the thought that all the old people had gone. She did wish that she had got off before the Hill-Clarks came fussing and bothering. They might have stayed away and left the poor Captain in peace a little longer. Delay, however, was not by any means in accordance with their views, eviction as speedy as possible being their aim, partly as a matter of convenience, partly, and mainly, as a mode of venting much stored up ill-humour. This disposition showed itself especially strong in Vi, who became so clamorous and urgent for Captain Delaney's departure that her brother was thoroughly disgusted. He assured her, drawing less perhaps on his legal knowledge than on his imagination, that a joint-tenant with the Maddens, of long standing, could not lawfully be summarily turned out of doors; but thereupon she set herself only the more assiduously to attain her end by the indirect method of making things disagreeable.

When Jack returned from a walk one afternoon, he found her in the large, queer-shaped hall, where she was helping Katty the housemaid to alter the positions of chairs and tables and umbrella-stands and mats; he stumbled over an unwontedly placed footstool. Mio, from a window-seat, was looking on dejectedly; he guessed why. "I say, Vi, couldn't you leave those things as they were for the short time that Captain Delaney will be here?" he said. "It makes it so much harder for him to get about if they aren't in the places he's used to."

"I do declare—you're the most ridiculously unreasonable—people I ever heard of," gasped Vi, who was tugging at one end of a heavy, old-fashioned settee. Letting it

go, she continued indignantly: "The nonsense you all go on with about that man is positively absurd. I must say that I think it's quite bad enough to have the nuisance of such a person being stuck in one's house, without having a whillaloo raised because one moves a bit of furniture. Anybody else would lend one a hand."

Appealed to thus, Jack lent a strong hand, but it was to shove the settee back against the wall. "That wasn't what I wanted at all," Vi complained; "you've put it just where it was before."

"You'd much better let it stay there, Vi," said Jack.

"Yes, do, Vi," said Mio. "It would be very kind of you."

"I wonder," said Vi, "how long you expect me to put up with such folly? Here, Kate, take hold of the other end." And she began again to tug. Jack shrugged his shoulders disgustedly and turned away, going towards the Captain's sitting-room; but Vi pursued him down the passage with what Carrie affectionately called her "hideous quack," waxing louder and more penetrating as he receded. "And I don't know either what *your* idea is of a short time. It's ten days now, and no signs of his stirring. That's a good while, I should say, to stick on in other people's houses, when it's most inconvenient. We'll be in May before we know where we are. I want that room particularly for the children's day-nursery; and he has it reeking with tobacco smoke—when I never let Gilbert so much as bring a pipe indoors."

On Captain Delaney's part there was no lack of desire, strengthened perhaps by such amenities, to make no avoidable tarrying. But the arrangements for his departure were slow work, much hampered by the absence of knowledgeable Larry Fahy, who, now convalescent, though still incapably crippled, had crawled

away, in the mood of a sick wasp, to lodgings near. To be drawing rations for idling round was, he said, no choice performance of his, and he could make out right enough on his savings till he got back some sort of soopleness into his devil-bewitched old joints. To find an abode for his master was, however, a matter of very considerable difficulty, in view of the scanty resources now at Captain Delaney's command, heavily taxed by the expenses of Larry's illness. An invitation to Craignogue he resolutely declined; he would not quarter himself on any household's hospitality and forbearance. Finally the Quins' collective researches could discover nothing more suitable than the spare room in the Lees' cottage, which they wanted to let. "It is poky, of course," Carrie wrote, "but quite clean, and they are decent people. Mrs. Paddy is very good-natured. At all events, anything is better than staying on with that pig Vi. If it was me, I would rather sleep under a hayrick."

So it was settled. On a spring morning the Captain, with Mio and Jack, took a farewell walk along the foam-rim of the rhythmical rush and murmur seething to and fro. Sea-birds were skirling and laughing all out of time with it; the curlew's cry pierced through their harsher notes like a plaintive reproachful word. At the railway station waited Larry Fahy, who had hobbled up to see them off, very full of, in the first place, mistrust about the Captain's destination, and, in the second, of a plan for regaining the use of his own limbs by parboiling in some hot salt-water baths, which he would make it his business to get. "A pig's crubeens, your Honour, would have as much handiness attached to them," he said, ruefully eyeing his own stiffened and distorted fingers. "Howsome'er they'll be limbered more than a trifle yet, by good luck, and then I won't delay long

route-marching after you, sir. Not but what I wouldn't mind laying even sixpences that when I've set foot in whatever place it is, I'd form the opinion that the next best thing we could do would be to clear out of it by the straightest road convenient. For no sort of satisfaction have I ever got about it. Farm-houses, bedad! Plenty of them I've seen would be the queer localities for the Captain to be stopping in, Miss Mio." A half-guilty consciousness that Larry's surmises were likely enough to be not far from the truth prevented Mio and Jack from reassuring him with much conviction, and they left him on the platform, gloomily shaking his head at the starting train.

Green and white, with fresh leaves and blades and blossoms, was the country through which they travelled, a forlorn three, on the whole, unseeing and seeing sadly. As they waited at quiet stations, they sometimes heard in the distance the cuckoo's crystal chime, which always sounds like a summons to happiness, but often is one with little less mockery in it than a call outside the hand's-breadth window of a prison closely barred. In its due degree it seemed so now to each of these passengers in the unluxurious third-class compartment. Loss and lack were the bars that forbade them to follow. Lost was lost, and lacked so threatened to be lacked, that hopes of unbarring held still further aloof than the cuckoo's call when it came from deep among the woods. Not that they need be supposed to have heard it without any pleasure, or to have journeyed immersed in gloom. They were just three people who could not get into tune with the song of spring, which had been struck up around them; but for the most part they kept their griefs to themselves, and might be described as nothing worse than mute notes or broken strings. Outwardly they were cheerful and conversational.

The despondency which ever and anon stole over Mio had, indeed, one very secret source, hardly traced by herself. She did not realize how wide a shadow was cast across her outlook by the non-arrival of a letter which she had been expecting for the last fortnight or so, and how much of her time went in wondering apprehensively why neither Mrs. Armitage nor Alfred had written. The explanation was simple and harmless. Having fallen a victim to influenza, Mrs. Armitage had fled the east winds of England to wander in Southern climes, where Mio's news of the trouble at Drumatin had failed to reach her, being stranded among the pigeon-holes of a sun-baked post-office in the Riviera. And her ignorance was shared by Alfred, at this time eagerly studying in Woolwich laboratories, on the track, as he hoped, of nothing less than a discovery. But Mio, watching for the postman at the chilly hall door, could not help her eyes growing larger and darker with disappointment when they saw that the desired envelope was not among the meagre mails, and all the world appeared unkind as her long empty day spread itself out before her, minus its master hope, which a moment had subtracted.

At Drumatin House its new owners naturally saw with satisfaction the exodus which they had successfully taken steps to accelerate. Naturally also the effect on their domestic felicity tended to fall rather below what had been expected. This did certainly happen one day soon after, when Vi was looking round Captain Delaney's former room. As she surveyed it, sunnily pleasant of aspect, airily spacious and lofty, there occurred to her a contrasting reminiscence of that one stuffy little room in the Lees' cottage, with which she was quite familiar. Ever since she had learned, with rather a shock, that this was Captain Delaney's destination, she had been subject to slight accesses of self-reproach for her own

energetic part in hurrying him away. One of them came on now, and to divert her thoughts, she set about her favourite pursuit of ransacking. A single table-drawer alone afforded her any scope, and contained nothing except a dusty letter, sticking in a crack. There was no envelope, a circumstance which justified her, she thought, in reading it that she might "see who it was to." It was dated nearly a dozen years back, and was from Mrs. Armitage to Captain Delaney. "I am, of course, no judge myself," one sentence ran, "but from what all his teachers say of Alfred, it seems quite evident that your son has inherited a full share of your scientific abilities." Vi read and re-read it, surprised and puzzled. "But how on *earth*," she said to herself, "could Alfred Armitage be Captain Delaney's son?" Her husband just then sauntered past the open window, through which she thrust to him the unfolded letter, with the perplexing statement indicated by a thumb affixed inquiringly cocked. "Look at that," she said; "it must be just some sort of joke or nonsense. For how on earth could Alfred Armitage be Captain Delaney's son?"

"Oh, but he is right enough," Mr. Hill-Clarke said. "Mrs. Armitage adopted him, you know, when he was a small baby. They kept his parentage a great secret from the general public, but old Lady Fenlow happened to tell me. I should have thought that your people would have known all about it."

"They never told me, if they did," said Vi. "Well, now, I do think that boy might have done something for him, when he's lost so much of his money, and is left so badly off. I believe Mrs. Armitage is a very rich woman; this Alfred has plenty, I daresay." The Lees' room was again in her mind, and she pronounced *this Alfred* in a tone of reprobation.

"Probably the young chap was glad enough to keep clear of the connection," Mr. Hill-Clarke conjectured not unsympathetically. "And you must remember that his father needn't have given him up if he hadn't liked and chosen to get rid of him. Two can play at that game, and it's his turn now."

Nevertheless, Vi continued to maintain a poor opinion of Alfred in his filial relation, all the more resolutely because along with the blame she bestowed on him, she appeared somehow to hand over any small share of culpability that she admitted on her own part. The new discovery was in her mind when later in the day she wrote to Mio inquiring about a missing key; and she added with no special relevance: "I suppose it can't make any great difference to a person who can't see, what sort of place they are in. But if Captain Delaney finds that he doesn't like living at the Lees, I should think Alfred Armitage could easily get better lodgings for him wherever they are themselves at present. He might do that much for his own father. Gilbert says he thinks it looks as if he intended to keep out of having anything more to do with him, as he will be such a poor relation. I think it is rather an odious idea, and a horrid way for him to go on."

Her communication transmitted her own shock of surprise in an intensified degree to Mio, whose first impulse on reading was to ascertain its truth or falsity. Her Uncle Charlie, smoking in the porch, was the first likely source of trustworthy information on which she lit, and she ran out to him with the inquiry. Hardly could its eagerness be suppressed: "Uncle Charlie, is Alfred Armitage really Captain Delaney's son? I don't see how he can be, but Vi says he is."

"It is a fact," said her uncle. "I remember they made a great point of concealing it at the time when

Mrs. Armitage adopted him. I never could quite understand why they did. Do you know, she took a great fancy to the idea of adopting *you*, Miss Mio, when you were a still smaller baby than he, but we didn't see our way to giving you up. Poor Delaney's circumstances were, of course, entirely different, and the boy is his son, sure enough."

"Does he know it himself?" Mio asked.

"Alfred? Well, I should imagine Mrs. Armitage must have had the sense to explain things to him long before this time," said Charlie Quin. "All sorts of bothers might arise if he were left in ignorance. Oh, yes, he probably knows all about it quite as well as Vi."

Turning away, Mio felt her cares increased by increase of knowledge. She had hoped to refute Vi's calumnies by disproof of the fact on which they were founded; but that was not to be, and though she burned with indignant impatience, it helped her to no other means. And never an Armitage letter came, as the slow days passed. They lumbered heavily along with jolts and jars; the gait of a clumsy machine out of gear on a rough road. To the defective working order and general eccentricities of the Craiganogue establishment Mio was well used and happily indifferent. But she could not be so philosophic on Captain Delaney's behalf about the shortcomings of his domicile with the Lees. That very little, ill-shaped room, just across the passage from the kitchen, with a sloping ceiling, beneath which he could only in places stand upright, with its awkward foot-snaring angles and projections, its perpetual atmosphere of stale turf smoke, was grievous to her whether as a thing thought of or seen. Less tolerable by far, however, was its lack of quiet. Therein seemed to congregate all the inevitable noises of the farmhouse. Shrieks of children, gabble of their elders, clashing of kitchen ware,

barks, bellows, grunts, squawks and screeches of domestic animals, these and others innumerable penetrated into it unceasingly, or with only the brief respite of a May night. And this after the silences of Drumatin, where the Captain need hear nothing, day out and in, except the sound of the waves and the wind, and what music he chose to make and have made. Now she sorrowfully knew that the blind man's sole access to his obscured world was becoming his torment and weariness, a way infested and intruded on until he often wished it closed. Danger of such serious consequences as injury to brain and nerves lay beyond the ken of her anxieties; but she saw that his cheerfulness was growing more forced, and that his wonted pleasures had lost their savour. His 'cello kept its case, and he seldom asked her to play or read aloud. When he did, she sometimes feared that it was more for her gratification than his own.

A volunteer entertainer appeared to him one day in the person of Gerald Quin, who, arriving with his accordion and "Church Hymnal," explained that although vocal gifts were denied to him, he hoped that a few hymn-tunes, instrumentally performed, might give Captain Delaney some pleasure. The visit was short, and the accordion did not come into play at all, which the Captain accounted for afterwards with a gleam of half-remorseful glee. He said: "I'm sure the poor lad meant it kindly; he had some idea, too, I think, of practising a pastoral call; but that was incidentally." And then he related how he had, as if casually, mentioned with approval a highly unorthodox article of belief, continuing the ascription to himself of more and more wildly heretical tenets, accompanied by Gerald's ejaculated protests: "Oh, but you know that's quite wrong. Oh, but you know that's a great mistake. Oh, but you know that's a most shocking thing to say"—until at last upon the

setting forth of an extemporized theory about the origin of the Archbishopric of Canterbury, the visitor abruptly rose and took his departure, making his exit with every sign of panic-stricken haste. But very few incidents from which any sort of diversion could be extracted enlivened those discomfortable days.

It was a wet and east-windy May, which made refuge out of doors seldom possible. Towards its end, however, came a morning of swiftly interwoven sunshine and shadow, with intervals during which no rain fell. Crossing the silvery-green wet fields between Craiganogue and the farm, Mio and Jack were distressed to come on Captain Delaney seated on a bank under a hedge, with grey sheets of rain flapping into his face. The shower had quite cleared off, he said, when he got Paddy Lee to leave him there till dinner-time and call for him passing back. Paddy thought it was apt to hold up till then, and a trifle over. "But, anyhow," said the Captain, "there was a duet in progress between a baby and a calf, which it seemed worth taking some risks to get beyond range of." At this Mio looked sadly over to Jack, and silently shook her head. "For occupation just now," the Captain continued, perhaps to prevent criticisms on his proceedings, "I was considering obviously desirable improvements in our machinery. First, of course, about a dozen spare pairs of eyes; and next, I should say, an apparatus for effectually shutting the ears as automatically as one blinks. It's a real want."

"Let me suggest," said Jack, "that sitting wet through in a cold wind seems a rather unpractical step towards effecting any sort of improvement."

"Not even off the face of the earth?" said Captain Delaney.

They were nearing the cottage door, through which at that moment tumbled out over one another a small flock

of fowl in a squawking, fluttering retreat from before Mrs. Paddy's brushwood besom. Mrs. Paddy herself came and stood on the threshold, peering into the rain with a face full of kindly concern. "Well, now, but himself was the demented jackass! A race's running on him, and serve him very right, for to go take his Honour out on the likes of such a day, and leave him to get his death under the teems of rain. He might see as plain as the brogues on his two feet 'twould be coming down again before you'd have time to give yourself a couple of shakes. For the honour and glory of God, Mr. Jack, bring him in till he gets out of them clothes—*dreeped* he is, and I have his dry suit heating itself at the kitchen fire. I'm just after searing the hens off it. And yourself, too, Miss Mio, me child, sopping wet, the way all you can do is run home and be changing every stitch you have on you. To be sure now a body might as easy dodge a butting goat in the narrow cow-lane as them sudden plumps of showers."

Laughing a little at Mrs. Paddy's talk, Mio set off home again, but at the bottom of her heart she was vexed. In the next field she met Carrie, who had followed her with a letter, just brought by the desultory postman. Carrie knew that she was watching for one. This letter, although not *the* letter, interested Mio much, as she read it under the lee of a thick furze hedge, that sheltered a Gideon's fleece of dryness at its foot. Larry Fahy was her correspondent, and he wrote thus :

"TO MISS HELVERAN.—MADAM. Dear Miss Mio, I write to let you know that I have this day recalled to mind what I was oblivious of up to the present time. For no great while previous to the death of the late Mr. David Madden, Esq., my services were requested by him, along with Mrs. Toole the cook, to witness him putting

his name to a paper in the library, to which the two of us likewise put the both of our names as well. And I write to let you know that to the best of my belief Mr. Madden rolled it up, and stuck it in the drawer of the spindle-legged table that looks to have none, where he was writing at it, behind the folding-screen in the top library window. And, as far as I could see, it was all there was in the drawer. Dear Miss Mio, very belike I had a right to mention the matter to the Family, but from that good day to this it went out of my head the same as if I was after dreaming it. So maybe it is there yet, whatever it is, or maybe it was got all right, or it might be thrown away, or nothing to signify. But that's the whole of it and it should be seen to. Dear Miss Mio, I hope that his Honour, and yourself, and all is getting your healths well where you are. Kate McNulty was telling me that a cousin of hers from those parts says Mrs. Lee's house is a biggish thatched cabin, and in my humble judgment it is no place for the Captain. But with the stiffness I have on me yet, never a hand's turn could I be doing him. So I am, Madam, Your obedient servant, dear Miss Mio,

“LAURENCE FAHY.

“I am about writing to Mr. Alfred Armitage. I got his address off a card there was in a two-pound packet of Navy-Cut that he sent me at Easter.”

“What do *you* think it is, Mio?” Carrie said, handing her back the letter.

“I suppose he has got it by this time,” Mio answered, taking it in a preoccupied manner.

“Who has got what?” said Carrie. “Do you mean that paper he signed? I wonder what it was?”

“Oh—I wasn't thinking of that,” Mio said, but she

did not disclose the subject of her thoughts. "Could it have been a will? They never found one, you know."

"That's just what I was going to say," said Carrie. "It sounds very like it. How delightful it would be if he had really left everything to Captain Delaney! I'd give anything to see those nasty Hill-Clarks trundled out of the place."

"I *should* be glad if the Captain was back there again," Mio said. "But it doesn't seem as if there could be much chance of that. You may be sure all the drawers were cleared out."

"I know that spindle-legged table," Carrie said. "You'd never think there was a drawer in it, as Larry says; and it *ought* to be seen to. And I'll tell you what, Mio, we ought to see to it ourselves—not let anybody there hear about it. Inconvenient wills have been made away with before now."

"*Carrie!*" Mio remonstrated. "I must say Vi hasn't behaved nicely, and I never wish to see Drumatin again while she's there. But we needn't suppose that she would do such a horribly wicked thing."

"She behaved like a beast, and you needn't trust her the length of your little finger," said Carrie. "I daresay the table's there still in the corner by the window. Just fancy putting your hand into the drawer, and fishing out a will that said not a penny should those piggish creatures lay their ugly paws on! I should love to do it."

A grotesque vision of her dear old Mr. Madden gravely inditing this singular testament gave Mio a pang of mirth.

"We'd better tell the others in the first place," she said. "We'll consult Uncle Charlie and Jack when they come in this evening."

To this course Carrie seemingly assented; yet there was a gleam in her eye hardly betokening acquiescence.

And at dinner-time Nannie Goligher, the garden-boy's mother, arrived astonishingly with the report that Miss Carrie had bid her leave word she was gone to Letterbrack on the eight o'clock train, to visit Miss Vi—the last clause was an addition of Nannie's own—and would be back to-morrow night.

CHAPTER XIX

CARRIE'S night journey to Letterbrack, the most adventurous deed that she had ever undertaken, was quite successfully accomplished. Arrived in the early freshness of a sparkling May morning, she felt much elated as well as very hungry, and having refreshed herself with an enormous twopenny bun, she walked along the quiet road, on past Drumatin gate, down to the strand. She would not go up to the house till between nine and ten, the Hill-Clarks' probable breakfast-time, when she might slip unobserved into the library, where she hoped that the table still stood on its spindle legs. Yet more earnestly she hoped to find in its drawers a valuable legal document, containing what would be virtually a notice to quit for mean, stuck-up Vi and her odious, smirking husband. Few triumphs had ever fallen to Carrie's lot, but this one, if she could achieve it, would be satisfyingly complete, with a sense that she had helped true friends, and beaten down baffling foes. In a comfortably-shaped niche among the rocks, just beyond the cliffs' shrinking shadow, long she sat forecasting such happiness, made half drowsy by a wakeful night, and the waters seething near, like a kettle somewhere that kept on boiling over and over in time to a sleepy tune.

Another visitor, equally unexpected, was at this time

speeding towards Drumatin in a swift motor-car along the road from Kingstown. The cause of his journey, a letter received the day before, was in his pocket, signed by Laurence Fahy, and addressed to Mr. Alfred Armitage. Larry, having written of Miss Madden's death, went on to relate the deplorable consequences of her intestacy.

"So the place and all went to a land-agent living up somewhere in the North, that married a daughter of Miss Mio's uncle. And down here the pair of them pounced before the funeral was well finished, and had the Captain thrown out of it in such a hurry, that I question did he get the one-half of his things packed up at all. I myself am living away from him this good while back, at Dan Rooney's, being on the sick-list with rheumatic joints. But I understand that them that had a right to know better have the Captain settled in an old shanty the worser of many a labourer's cottage; and that's what I do be thinking very bad of, the same as to be sure yourself would, Mr. Alfred, if it came to your knowledge. Truth it is he's been at great losses, that I maybe have no business to be talking about, with the most of any money he had gone in a bank when it went smash, that would be a serious contingency for any person, let alone one like the Captain. Hard put to it Miss Mio and myself was a while back to hinder him of starving and perishing; but now the matter is passed beyond my control, and I doubt will she be able to prevent it, do her best."

During his journey Alfred had read Larry's letter through several times with increasing perturbation, blaming himself much for the unusual length of time which he had allowed to elapse without news from Drumatin, and chafing at the restraints imposed by even a very elastic speed-limit as he travelled towards its rusty gates.

On that morning its mistress was not in a mood to receive chance callers graciously. Her temper had been ruffled by a discussion at breakfast, when she had discovered that her husband entertained about the place views which did not at all fall in with her own. He contemplated either putting the house in repair and living there permanently, or selling the little property to an adjacent farmer, desirous of more land. Neither plan suited Vi. To spend the whole year buried alive there would be deadly, but she thought she would like it as a summer residence, and wished to have it put in order for that purpose. She argued that lots of people kept up two houses, and she didn't see why *they* shouldn't, when they had come in for three or four hundred a year along with it, and the strand would be capital for the children. You could just pack them off there in the morning with a maid, and have little or no more bother about them for the rest of the day. Failing to convince, she diverged into a recital of miscellaneous grievances, whereupon the tone of the conversation became irrelevantly recriminating, and in the end she had seen Mr. Hill-Clarke set out for Cork, whither she felt bitterly certain that he was going to make arrangements of which she was sure to disapprove.

So profoundly, in fact, had her ill-humour been stirred, that it was not mollified even by a youth as really remarkable for good looks and agreeable manner as Alfred Armitage. When in the course of the forenoon his card was brought upstairs to her, she broke into many loud exclamations of amazed annoyance at the extraordinary behaviour of people you know next to nothing about, who come pestering you at such unearthly hours; and she descended to receive him in the Captain's sitting-room with what she considered to be a courteous, yet distantly dignified, air, expressing a due sense of his

misdeemeanour. Maggie, the parlour-maid, was, however, telling Mrs. Toole in the kitchen that herself had gone down looking sour enough to turn a pan of new milk, and she swimming along in her skirts with a bit of a waggle, the very way that the old lad up in the top yard did, if anything put him out. The old lad was a formidable turkey-cock. And Mrs. Toole rejoined that Himself and her had sounded none too pleasant argufying at breakfast; he might be apt to find that he had got one too many for him, when he began to grow an old man, and she a middling youngish woman yet. He'd do well to keep a tight hand over her as long as he was able.

Mrs. Hill-Clarke had not seen Alfred Armitage since her wedding day; still, it now struck her that there was about the black head and grey-blue eyes, the square forehead and straight brows, something recognizable which seemed to link that small page-boy with this tall young man. He having apologized for his untimely intrusion, and she having stiffly replied that she was not very particularly busy just at that moment, "I called," he hurried to say, "because I thought you might be able to give me Captain Delaney's present address. I learn that he is no longer living here."

"Oh, of course not," said Vi; "the property has come to us."

"And he has left this neighbourhood?" said Alfred. "Can you tell me whether he has been ill? Something his old servant wrote made me think he might be."

"I never heard that he was," said Vi. "If he is, none of them told *me*. That man, Larry Fahy, came up here the other day, and began haranguing about it, as if he thought Captain Delaney's going was any affair of mine. I suppose we weren't likely to keep paying guests, and that sort of thing."

"But you do know his address?" said Alfred.

"Oh, well, I know the place where he is; I should think it hadn't any particular name. It's just the house of one of the tenants on my father's estate up at Lis-martin—Craiganogue, you know. A wretched little hole of a dirty cottage, with chickens and pigs running in and out of it," said Vi, whose mood found some solace in holding up evils to a magnifying mirror. "Indeed, it's hardly fit for anything else. What possessed them to stuff the unfortunate man into such a place I can't imagine, unless the fact is that he was living on the Maddens all the while, and has hardly anything of his own. But he must be most horribly uncomfortable there."

"I wish to Heaven that I had been here at the time, or had known anything about it at all," said Alfred.

"I should think you certainly might have made some more suitable kind of arrangement for your father," said Vi. "Of course, he's nothing to the others, and can't do much for himself." She spoke with severity, still regarding Alfred Armitage as to blame for the absurd feelings of compunction which had occasionally visited her.

"For my father? What do you mean, Mrs. Hill-Clarke?" he said, looking hard at her suddenly, as if, she remarked to herself, she had grown seven heads.

"Why, for Captain Delaney, your father, I'm sure you might have managed to get him better lodgings near where you live, with a little trouble," Vi said, in a tone of rebuke.

"I never saw my father within my recollection—he died when I was a small infant," said Alfred.

Vi was rather alarmed, because he looked so much as if the ghost of this parent long since departed had risen up before him. "My husband was sure you knew all

about it," she said, "everybody did—at least, lots of people; only they hugger-muggered it up, and made a mystery of it at the time when Mrs. Armitage adopted you. But, of course, Captain Delaney is your father; it was only your mother who died. He wanted to get rid of you then, and I suppose you'll want to get rid of him now; but if you don't believe me, you can ask Mrs. Armitage—or look, there's an old letter I have from her to Captain Delaney"—she pointed to it lying on the table where she had left it the day before yesterday—"read that, and you'll see for yourself."

He jumped up to take it, and began to read it unscrupulously. As she saw the paper shaking in his hands, she reflected: "If I'd known that he would make such a fuss about it, I'd have held my tongue. But I can't see what great difference it makes to him, when he's going into the army, and not likely ever to have much to do with him in future. It's not as if Captain Delaney wasn't quite a respectable person, and all that, although he may be a bore. Of course, one wouldn't like to find out that one belonged to a convict, or anything of that sort."

Alfred threw down the letter. "Thank you, Mrs. Hill-Clarke, and excuse me for interrupting you. I'll go on there at once," he said. But before he could move, the door was opened and in came Carrie.

She looked dishevelled and crumpled, but under a very crooked hat her face was radiant with the joy of hopes fulfilled. For she had had that intensely desired moment. Her raid on the library had been entirely successful, and her lucky hand had drawn forth a document so plainly worded, that even her small understanding of legal terms sufficed to show its nature and satisfactory purport. And it bore the three necessary signatures. With it stowed away safely in her hand-bag, Carrie felt

that she could confront the world, and his wife, for the time being embodied in her sister Vi, of whom she went straightway in quest, gleefully ready to join battle.

"Good gracious! *Carrie!*" Vi exclaimed with sour surprise. "What on earth brings *you* here?"

"I came to look for something in the library—something, I think, belonging to Captain Delaney, and I found it all right," Carrie replied with calm complacency.

"Oh, indeed! There's nothing like being free and easy in another person's house," Vi said with sarcasm. "And may I ask what you have been taking out of the library?"

"Nothing of yours," Carrie replied shortly. Having become aware of Alfred Armitage's presence, she judged that it would be more seemly to defer the announcement of her discovery. "Only a paper. Oh, Mr. Armitage, did you come in the motor I heard arriving just now?"

"Yes, on my way to Craiganogue," said Alfred. "I want to see Captain Delaney particularly. Have you come from there, Miss Quin? I hope he is well, and your cousin?"

"Oh, he's quite well," said Carrie, "and he'll be all right now that you're coming to see after him. We were wondering why you didn't—some of us, that is to say, for Mio declares that you can never have known anything about his being your father."

"Nor did I," said Alfred. "After all these years, I never knew until a few minutes ago."

"It's really quite romantic," Carrie said, giggling slightly. "Dear me, Mr. Armitage, do you remember the last time we were in this room? How comfortable we were all together, with poor Captain Delaney playing away on his big fiddle in the firelight! Well, I hope it won't be long now before he's back here again, for of course— Do you know, I used to wonder lately who it was that he reminded me of, but I see it must have

been of you, for your forehead and eyes are very like his, and your hair grows the same way, only that his has turned so white."

"Perhaps you can let me know how many *more* people are likely to come walking in and out of this house, and settling who's to stay here?" said Vi.

"I wouldn't bother myself about that if I were you, my dear. You won't be troubled with anything of the kind much longer," said Carrie, who found discreetly cryptic speech increasingly difficult. "I'm off now to catch the next train."

"You'd better let me drive you home, Miss Quin," said Alfred. "It will be quicker than the railway, considering that hour's wait at the Junction, and all the stops."

So they started, too much preoccupied with more interesting subjects to be aware of the exasperation which they left behind them, conspicuous though it was on Mrs. Hill-Clarke's countenance as she watched them away.

Alfred quite agreed with Carrie, who could not refrain from showing it to him as they travelled, that the document which she had found was, indeed, David Madden's duly executed will. It simply bequeathed all his property to his sister Clementina, with a reversion to his old friend Lambert Delaney.

"So there's for you, Mrs. Cock-yourself-up, with your two country houses!" reflected Carrie, whose habits of thought and expression had undergone no great changes since her schoolroom days. She had developed, however, sufficient discrimination to abstain from bringing forward this view of the case, and to be satisfied with enlarging on her pleasure, which was sincere, at the Captain's prospect of again having a home, if he wished it, among his old familiar haunts. By encouraging her to pursue

the subject, Alfred incidentally gathered up details, which interested him, about his father and her cousin Mio.

Thoroughly did Carrie enjoy her journey with its still unwonted experience of rushing at express-train speed between hawthorn-scented hedges in quiet country roads and narrow boreens. The excitement often caused by their passing in out-of-the-way places gratified her; it gave her the sensation of making a royal progress. She thought that the chauffeur's livery was very stylish, and she much admired the profusion of highly-polished brass on the machine. But the best of it was that all these brilliant circumstances seemed really appropriate to what might be considered a triumphal return.

"I don't believe that if it hadn't been for me," she said to herself, "anybody would ever have done a hand's turn about Larry Fahy's letter, until those Hill-Clarks had got hold of the will somehow." Her grasp tightened on the handle of her little bag. "And then we might as well have gone to fish for it in the lough, for all that we'd ever have heard of it again." With this consciousness of merit pervading her mind, she happily saw the day go by, until it declined, from the broad, impartial glow of noontide, and began to lavish largesse of golden light on the west. Then, when the landscape had grown familiar, and they were within a few minutes' whirl of Craiganogue, they swept past, near the foot of a steep hill, a short, thin man, who was pushing up his bicycle.

"Poor Doctor Fitzsimon, he'll have a very long trundle to the top of this," said Carrie, "and I daresay he's been ever so far on his rounds, for he always goes, no matter who sends for him."

"Oh, if I'd known that he was a friend of yours," said Alfred, "we might have offered him a lift, machine and all. Shall we go back?"

But Carrie replied : " Oh, he isn't any particular friend of mine at all," and again giggled a little. " He'll be wondering where you picked me up."

At Craiganogue, with the sunset flaring against the narrow windows of the patchily plastered front, the arrival aroused much surprise and curiosity. Yet all that could be told there and heard, failed to make it the main centre of interest, which, for at least one of the new-comers, lay across the fields in the Lees' brown and white cottage. Thither, after a very brief delay, Carrie and Alfred continued their journey on foot, accompanied by Flossie and Jack. The level rays shot dazzlingly into their eyes ; the two girls talked at full speed without surcease. Evidently Carrie's find had not lit on a time when it would have been conspicuous as the only strong sensation in the domestic circle. Although everybody acclaimed the discovery—except Mrs. Quin, commenting querulously : " Then poor Vi gets nothing, after all ? I must say I can't see what there's so delightful in its going to strangers away from your own sister"—it was partially eclipsed by the interposing of other novel events. Of these the most striking for the moment was young Mr. Armitage's appearance in the character of Captain Delaney's son. Unknown hitherto by the juniors, and half forgotten by the seniors, the fact now seemed to give additional importance from the low ebb of the Captain's fortunes. Everybody was more or less of the opinion expressed by Charlie Quin that it wouldn't be much to the young fellow's credit if he left his father—unlucky enough in all conscience—living in a little smoky glory-hole at Paddy Lee's. But there was another circumstance which tended to turn the edge of interest in Carrie's news. The Captain's misfortunes at present included a threat of serious illness. That morning he had seemed quite alarmingly unwell, shivering and

feverish, as if suffering from the effects of his drenching the day before; and though he had improved in the afternoon, they were still uneasy about him. Old Mrs. Lee thought he was in for something that would do him no good, and prescribed bed with hot drinks, but he would have none of them. On the contrary, he was sitting up, and had asked Mio to come and read him the newspaper. Flossie, who related all this to Carrie, added that he looked awfully bad, and that if he was not much better in the morning he ought to see Dr. Fitzsimon. Carrie's emphatic assent brought them to the cottage door.

A voice sounding from behind the left-hand latched door a few steps down the broken-flagged passage guided Alfred on, while the others stopped in converse with Mrs. Lee. Looking into the room, he felt almost as if he had walked up against its opposite wall, such a narrow strip of space intervened. It was really very low, dark and close, but, indeed, a miserable nook of a lodging to him, come in straight from the clear, sunset-litten air of the wide-horized fields. By the small, deep-set window on his right stood an unwieldy, canopied arm-chair, in which Captain Delaney sat, huddled up in a heap, Alfred thought with grieved dismay, but was both glad and grieved to see with what eager alertness the drooping figure erected itself when he said:

"Am I to come in, Captain?"

"By Jove! it's the Sapper—the Sapper himself," Captain Delaney said, holding out his hands and listening, for he had long since given up trying to look in the direction of the voice. His high delight was manifest, was undisguisable. "And you're going to stay a bit longer *this* time?" he said.

"Myself it is, Captain," said Alfred. "And I'm going to stay, right enough. You won't find it an easy matter

to get rid of me, I can tell you. But I want to know why you've turned me into a sort of Prodigal Son all the days of my life."

Captain Delaney started, involuntarily tightening his grip of Alfred. "Now what has put that notion into your head?" he said, evading the question. "Besides, of course, you haven't been any such thing."

"Something uncommonly like it, then," said Alfred. "You can't suppose that if I'd known who I was I would have let all my chances and opportunities slip the way I did? It might have been: *lo, these many years*—but, as it is, I might as well have been one of the Prodigal's herd, not to say himself, for any use I ever was to you. Why, I've hardly even seen you since I was more than a kid, except just for a day here and there."

"But, Sapper—Sapper," the Captain interrupted his reproaches deprecatingly, "you're utterly mistaken; you've been all manner of use. Haven't I heard from you and about you, and what better could you have been doing than you have done? Don't you see, it was just to prevent any risk of your time being wasted and your chances lost, and that you might learn your business with an easy mind?"

"We needn't have lived out of reach of one another, Captain," Alfred continued his accusations, "and I think my mind would have been several sizes easier if we hadn't; for, at any rate, since your friend David Madden went, I've often wondered how you were getting on, and feared you must be having a lonely time."

"Oh, I've done finely one way or another; you needn't imagine yourself so indispensable, you Sapper fellow," said the Captain. "I can just put up with your society now and then, that's all. But there's that little girl, who has been a great stand-by—little Miss Helveran. I can't tell you how awfully good she is to me!"

"Mio—of course, I know she's an angel. There's no one like her in this world, or any other, by Jove! that's sure enough," Alfred suddenly averred.

"What a wool-gathering ass I am!" said Captain Delaney. "She's here herself, you know, all the while, Mio. Don't you see her sitting over there in the corner by the window? She was reading the newspaper for me."

Thereupon Alfred became aware of a dark head outlined for a moment against the little golden panes, as Mio rose up and came towards him round the back of the big chair. Meeting her he said:

"Mio, dear child, I've made my way to you at last. Dear little Mio, I wonder if *you* are in the least glad to see me?" He had taken what was for him all the universe into his arms, which could easily have encompassed two of it. And Mio said:

"I—I can't see you very well, Alfred." Her voice was meek, and sounded slightly smothered.

The Captain was laughing gleefully to himself as he sat. "I say, is that the way it is? So I'm to have an angelic daughter—along with a prodigal son? Well, I couldn't be better pleased."

At this moment a step, a creak, from the direction of the door, which stood ajar, caused such a speedy regrouping, that if anybody had come in it would have been to discover Mio discreetly intent on the hastily snatched up *Irish Chronicle* and to overhear the following dialogue:

"Is there any news to-day?"

"Not a word, I believe."

"There never *is* these times."

Nobody did come in, however, until some minutes later, when it was Flossie and Carrie, Jack having set off on a stravade over the bog, who arrived full of the tidings about the restoration of Drumatin, and rather surprised

to find that Alfred had not forestalled them. Flossie exclaimed at the improvement in Captain Delaney's looks, and Carrie declared that she never had seen him looking better in her life. That evening passed and ended merrily, amid much laughter, and the making of many plans.

CHAPTER XX

BUT the next morning brought such a change in the aspect of affairs as comes over a landscape when grey mist streams in at the mountains' seaward gap; one more object lesson on the uncertain shining of the hopes that light up the world for us, "and by and by a cloud takes all away." This cloud was Captain Delaney's relapse into obviously grave illness. Summoned by an early messenger, Dr. Fitzsimon pronounced him to be suffering from pneumonia, and did not by any means like his symptoms, which rapidly became even less favourable.

There followed long days of anxiety and suspense, mocked at by young June's brilliant weather, when hopes and fears fluctuated in an intricate series, varying in accordance with the patient's swallowing a spoonful more or less, and a fractional fall or rise in his temperature. They were variously distributed, too, among his friends. Of the more sanguine were Mio and Alfred, who would otherwise have found their importunate happiness quite paradoxically unendurable, and Carrie, whose faith was firmly pinned to Dr. Fitzsimon's skill. Extremes met in the more despondent party, for it included both himself and the Dublin specialist as well as old Mrs. Lee. She, indeed, gave up the case altogether when on the

doctor's advice the sick man was removed from the smoky atmosphere of her cottage, and borne across the fields to Craiganogue. As she stood at the door watching the procession out of sight her solemnly expressed opinion was that the master, and the two young gentlemen, and Mr. Armitage, might save themselves trouble if they made the one job of it, and carried the poor Captain straightways to the graveyard, for there they'd have to be taking him before they knew where they were, after that demented piece of work. It gave her, she said, the cold creeps to see a sick person lifted up off his warm bed, and brought out under the open sky, as if they were about enticing a cold blast to light down and give him his death; when what they had a right to be doing was to stop up every crack and crevice where he lay with cloths, to hinder the draughts of air from getting at him, and keep the spark of life in him, if they had a mind to give him e'er a chance, good or bad. Notwithstanding, however, the disapproval of Mrs. Lee, this treatment was justified by its results. For presently that cloud lifted, and the landscape glimmered back, freshly sparkling, into the sun. Captain Delaney, that is to say, escaped from the peril and oppression of his malady, was pronounced to be on the way towards convalescence. If he had not escaped by the road he would himself have chosen, he concealed the disappointment, and did not allow it to jar against the joyful relief which his recovery caused in a pair of lovers, whose eyes had grown appreciably larger during those critical days.

He was still keeping his room, when there came a sultry morning, whose murky aspect made nervous people hear thunder in every rumble of a cart-wheel or moan of a wind-ruffled wood. As time passed on, some distant growls that were uttered now and then had certainly no such innocuous source. Carrie roamed in

perturbation about the house, hurrying past windows, and predicting a storm, in which she found everybody cruelly ready to believe. Still, it continued merely to roll far aloof among the hills, without threat of nearer approach. In the afternoon appeared a promise of brightening up, and the ominous sounds ceased. Mrs. Armitage and Alfred, who were staying at Lismartin, motored over to inquire, and invited Carrie to accompany them on their return, but she, too, little trusted even the clearing sky to venture on that otherwise desirable drive. Alfred was coming back with grapes for the Captain, and might be expected about dinner-time. Long before then, however, the weather had resumed its scowl. While mutterings and muffled booms grew in frequency and distinctness, a general movement began among the clouds and mists over the hills, which were soon blurred and hidden. Next a solid cloud-wall detached itself from the vaporous welter, and came drifting across the wide dark level of the bog with a coppery glare behind and above. It reared up purple-black crenellations, and was curtained with livid steamy white along stretches of its lowering front. Thunder drums throbbing louder and louder attended its progress, and it flashed ever brightening searchlights before it.

As they flickered across the windows of Craiganogue, Carrie fled for refuge to an obscure recess, where cloaks were hung at the furthest end of the hall, her wonted resort in such emergencies. She had more than usual need of it on this occasion, for the storm burst with really terrific violence. With incessant roaring and bellowing mingled sharper sounds of rending and crunching, as if some prodigious beast had leaped upon, and was tearing its hunted prey. The lightning flared like a network of fiery blades flung in blinding meshes far and

wide. Mio turned many a fearful thought to the car that was probably on its way along the lonely shelterless road from Lismartin, and thinking, she found it impossible to sit still. As she wandered aimlessly to and fro, she reflected with half-scared self-scorn that she was getting as bad as Carrie, whom she supposed to be in her customary hiding-place. If she had not been ashamed, she would have joined her there for company. Instead she went to take a hasty look-out from the porch.

She was crossing the lurid gloom and glare of the hall, with many a stop and start at a crash over her head, or a flash before her eyes, when somebody came rushing in at the front door and ran up against her. To her amazement she saw that it was Carrie, wild-eyed, bare-headed, with hail-stones flecking her hair. Panting and shivering, as if she had plunged into and out of icy water, she frantically clutched Mio, and seemed unable to speak. In view of the fierce white fire-floods swirling outside, Mio could hardly believe that she had beheld emerging from them Carrie, the notorious poltroon.

"Where *have* you been, Carrie?" she said. "And what on earth were you doing?"

"It was the gate," said Carrie, "the middle gate. I knew it was shut because of the sheep on the upper lawn. And I thought he'd get through quicker if he hadn't to stop, and be under shelter the sooner—but oh, it seemed to be miles and miles away. I didn't think I'd ever get there, or back again at all. Oh, Mio, I didn't!"

Mio had turned very white. "So you went and opened it. Of course, it would save time; but I never thought of it, and I don't believe I'd have dared to do it. Oh, Carrie, you were very courageous!"

"I *wasn't*," Carrie said. "I was frightened out of

my seven senses." "Oh, I feel as if I would be frightened all the rest of my life—it was so horribly dreadful!" She positively writhed at the recollection. "Oh, did you see that flash? It's atrocious; he'll certainly be killed; and that's all I can do for him!" In a lull between the peals a sound of murmuring voices rose up the kitchen stairs. "Oh," she cried, "there are the servants saying their prayers." And as if this somehow added an intolerable touch to her terror, she broke away from Mio, and fled back into the dark corner.

But Mio stood still there for a long while thinking deeply, grieved and much perplexed. Even after Alfred had arrived unscathed, followed soon by the scarcely expected Dr. Fitzsimon, who reported most favourably on his patient, and after the storm had sailed away more rapidly than it had come, she continued to wear a troubled countenance in the serene evening light. The problem which had been abruptly propounded to her was this. It had been decreed that afternoon by Mrs. Armitage and Captain Delaney that the announcement of Mio and Alfred's plans should take place on the morrow. Hitherto they had been known by only a quartette; but Mrs. Armitage disapproved of secret engagements, and the Captain saw no reason for one. Consequently Mio had made up her mind to tell Carrie about it that evening. She had thought that, on the whole, Carrie would be pleased. Not entirely so, perhaps, being of the disposition that finds something not altogether agreeable in the good fortune of friends; yet with the preponderant satisfaction of one who was at heart a well-wisher. Some few slight misgivings she had had, caused by the veiled allusions which Carrie occasionally made to somebody who was sentimentally occupying her thoughts; somebody who might possibly be Alfred. Still, even if this were the case, Mio was sufficiently

acquainted with Carrie's turn for foolish and unfounded romancing to apprehend nothing beyond a mere fleeting fancy, imagined chiefly for amusement, and not by any means intended to be taken seriously. And now to block out so jocose, so farcical a view there rose up a solemn and tragical fact: Carrie had confronted what was to her mortal fear and danger to lessen Alfred's risks, and by her subsequent words and demeanour had left no doubt about her feelings towards him. Seen in this new light, Mio's communication seemed a dreadful task; to crush hope mortifyingly while telling of her own happiness. It had become, however, a duty which she must perform without delay, for Carrie must not be exposed to the chance of hearing the news in public unprepared. All through that evening the shadows hovered over her, like the wing of an ill-omened bird, bringing a harassment not easy to disguise.

When the loitering midsummer twilight had nearly withdrawn itself from the misty fields, Mio, gazing at nothing out of her window, was turned round by someone's entrance, and found herself face to face with Carrie, who looked excited, but in nowise distressed.

"Well now, Mio," she said, "I've just heard the news—about you and Alfred Armitage. Captain Delaney told Jack and me. Of course, I've had my suspicions that something of the kind was going on; but I didn't know that he had actually proposed; and lately the Captain, and Drumatin, and everything had put it out of my head. My goodness, Mio, you look as if you were quite scared by the lightning still, though you weren't anywhere near it. If *I* was, now, one wouldn't wonder."

"But I'm not a bit," said Mio, "and I'm so glad that you don't mind about it." Unconsciously she sighed with relief.

"*Don't mind*—don't mind about what?" said Carrie. "Oh, about you and Alfred. Why on earth should I mind? I should think it was all right. But you don't seem to be pleased about it yourself somehow. When I came in first your face was as long as my arm. What made you accept him, if you didn't like it? I suppose you're not marrying him for money—of course, he is well off—or anything of that sort? Or have you changed your mind? It's not too late."

"Oh, Carrie, what absurd ideas you take up!" said Mio. "It wasn't that, indeed, or anything except an idea I had myself, just as absurd perhaps; only you know you did run out to open the gate for his car, and that put it into my head. It's all nonsense, of course, and no matter."

But Carrie would not by any means let it rest in such vagueness. "Good gracious! for his car! Then you thought I was in love with Alfred Armitage, that boy? He's nice enough, but years too young for me, and it wasn't of *him* or his car I was thinking an atom; there were plenty of other people out in the storm besides him, though I suppose, according to you, there was nothing else of any importance on the road between this and Jerusalem. I'm sure a bike is very dangerous in a thunderstorm."

"Oh, I see," Mio said, and nodded with a glimmer of mingled enlightenment and mirth stealing into her eyes as she remembered the cyclist's visit. "It was another person. And maybe you have news too?"

"Not I," Carrie said ruefully, with clouded countenance, "nor likely to have. I declare, Mio, it isn't fair at all. There are you, who never did a hand's turn for your Alfred, and he thinks everything in the world of you. And here am I, that might have been shrivelled

up black like a fly in a lamp, and Doctor—the other person—wouldn't have cared a pin."

"But I don't believe that, Carrie," Mio said, swiftly reviewing late events for encouraging reminiscences. "I really and truly do not. And, of course, he knows nothing about it."

"It wouldn't make any difference," Carrie said disconsolately. "At one time I was beginning to—— But if he had any intentions, would he have taken another dispensary instead of staying on here? He's going off, you know, next month to a place up in the North."

This had not been known by Mio, to whom it seemed an unpromising sign. Sympathy, rendered imperfect by a regret that Carrie would speak so like a housemaid, conflicting with a doubt, whether encouragement could be discreet, kept her hesitantly dumb. Carrie moved towards the door, but turned round in the middle of the room to say: "I wish I was as thin as you are, Mio."

"Why should you?" Mio inquired, surprised at the nearest approach to a compliment that she had ever received from Carrie.

"Because," said Carrie, "he doesn't admire fat people. I know, for once I heard him saying that he thought there was too much of the eldest Miss Riall. He said it in a laughing sort of way, as if it was a joke, but I'm certain he meant it in earnest. So I took tea without sugar, which I detested, and gave up butter, and ate dry biscuits instead of hot bread, for a month; and at the end of it I had put on five pounds; so there's no use trying." She withdrew dejectedly before Mio could find anything consolatory to say about this unsuccessful dietetic experiment. But she did devise a scheme, if it deserves that somewhat dubious term, of which the purpose was that Carrie's daring deed should not prove equally fruitless.

Next morning Dr. Fitzsimon happened to be discussed by Alfred and Mio. Alfred spoke his praise.

"He's a good sort, I think. Very kind, and seems to know his business right well; my father would hardly have got through that worst night only for him."

Mio thought it rather a pity that he had such a habit of laughing continually at nothing. "I suppose it's just nervousness," she said. "He is a shy sort of man, and one can see that he doesn't think at all too much of himself."

"I daresay he would be none the worse for a little more self-confidence," Alfred agreed.

Then, having diverged to yesterday's storm, Mio related the story of Carrie and the gate. "She knew that both you and Doctor Fitzsimon were likely to be coming that way, you see."

"It was really an uncommonly plucky thing for her to do," said Alfred.

"I thought I'd tell you," said Mio. "And we ought to tell him too; for why should she not have the credit of it?"

"Certainly," said Alfred. "Indeed, your cousin may well consider us a pair of ungrateful beasts."

In the course of that morning Alfred, who outside the porch was helping Dr. Fitzsimon to mend a punctured tyre, took occasion to inform him how it had come about that the middle gate had been open so opportunely for the passage of his wheel. On hearing it, he laughed after his manner immoderately, though anyone could see that he was immensely impressed.

"You don't mean to say that she ran out into that storm—he! he! he!—positively risking her life. Brien Walsh had a cow killed in his field about that very time. It makes one shudder to think of it—he! he! And she

a nervous, timid girl, so susceptible to electrical disturbances! Well now, I can only say that Miss Carrie is a perfect heroine—a heroine."

"She is, indeed," Alfred assented, giving the wheel a careful spin. Rather a long pause followed, and then:

"A girl like that——" Dr. Fitzsimon began, but broke off to make a fresh start. "Such a girl as Miss Carrie is a prize that any man might think worth having."

"I should say so," Alfred said, and added: "But isn't to be had, you know, without asking."

"Or with it either, perhaps," Dr. Fitzsimon replied, laughing quite wildly.

"That depends," Alfred said oracularly. "'Faint heart,' you know. But, at any rate, she has set us an example in courageousness."

Thereupon silence set in again, broken at last by Carrie's voice in the hall, calling to a dog. A moment afterwards Dr. Fitzsimon remarked: "I must go and wash my hands; they're outrageously muddy," and he went quickly indoors.

Alfred leaned the bicycle up against the wall. "He'll be a good while washing them, I daresay," he thought, as he went to join Mio, who was close by, gathering speedwell in a weedy, shrubby corner. "I believe he has actually gone to do it," he said to her. "For the last few minutes I've seen him visibly screwing up his courage, and now it has stuck."

The conjecture was right. Towards luncheon-time, Mio, on her way to the house, was overtaken by a padding of hasty feet, sped after her down the laurel walk, and Carrie burst upon her, in rapturous ecstacy.

"Oh, Mio, my dear, it's all right, after all! We're engaged, too, I and Doctor Fitzsimon—Tom I must call him now. You see, I was quite entirely mistaken. The reason he didn't speak out sooner was that he didn't

think himself good enough for me—not good enough, indeed! And you can't imagine what a fuss he made about me running out to open the gate. He says that Joan of Arc was a joke to me, and that I ought to have two Victoria Crosses, and lend him one to wear on Sundays. I never knew anybody who was always saying such funny things. Of course, he is awfully clever. Look at the way he's cured poor Captain Delaney! My goodness! just fancy your thinking that I was in love with *Alfred Armitage*!—though he's a nice boy, all the same. I suppose we'll be not too well off, but I don't care a pin. I'd rather be Mrs. Thomas Fitzsimon than anybody else in the world, poor or rich."

Her joyful strains flowed on interminably, but did not come to an end of Mio's interest, which provided for them at least one pleased and sympathetic listener.

In those June days Mrs. Armitage declared that to call at Craiganogue was a hazardous enterprise for anybody who had scruples about breaking up lovers' meetings, a misdeed which could not easily be avoided, with three pairs of them always at large about the place. This was an over-statement, as Mio and Alfred were seldom to be found apart from Captain Delaney, and Gerald Quin sometimes sought his Louie in her home at the Vicarage, though they more often preferred his more spacious demesne. Neither was Carrie's Tom invariably at leisure for what he himself called philandering. One afternoon, however, Mrs. Armitage did venture into the perilous precincts, where she was detained to dine, with the result that a little later in the evening circumstances led to her taking a stroll out of doors in the company of Flossie Quin and Louie Hannay. She found it slightly dull. They were good-natured, cheerful girls, platitudinous in conversation, and parochial in tastes, so that she was not more than politely occupied by their remarks,

as she followed the path which skirted the wet lawns. It had been a showery day, and the sun was going down among masses of high-piled clouds, multitudinously ranged, towering and glistening. When Mrs. Armitage came with her companions to a point from which, at the edge of a long slope, they had the wide west over against them, they saw low above the hills a mere of vivid pale sea-blue, rimmed with fiery golden shores, pansy-purple cliffs, and boldly thrust promontories flushed to rose-colour. Silvery-white cloudlets flecked its surface, like elfin sails, or floating swans, or water-lilies; but ever and anon they were all drowned in one wave of glowing flame, as a long ray passed through them on its burning way to earth.

"Oh, how beautiful!" said Louie. "But I'm sure nobody could ever paint it: they'd never get the right colours to match it. Do you think they could, Mrs. Armitage?"

"I'm sure I know what she is thinking," said Flossie. "She's wishing that poor Captain Delaney in there could see it. Aren't you, Mrs. Armitage?"

"Well, no," Mrs. Armitage replied; "in fact, wishes of that kind never do occur to me, perhaps because I'm so perfectly certain that if I regained my sight after twenty years in the dark, I'd be just as crazily delighted with the appearance of any old scarecrow as with the sun and moon and all the stars of the sky."

"How very funny! Now I really can't imagine," Louie said, quick to seize the point, "that anything could be prettier than this sunset."

One of its long rays was just then slanting in at the west window of the old schoolroom, whither Captain Delaney had resorted with his future angelic daughter, and his former prodigal son. They intended to have some music, and the Captain had got out his 'cello for

the first time since his departure from Drumatin. Helped by Alfred, Mio was putting a new string into her violin. Suddenly the Captain, who sat facing the window, said :

"Is the sun shining very brightly over there?"

"It's just caught on an angle of the square glass vase on the little table," said Alfred, "and it's sending a ray with all sorts of prismatic colours across the floor towards us—very bright and dazzling."

"I see it," said Captain Delaney. "I see it."

At first some fear fell on them all, scarcely knowing what to think. Soon, however, the amazing fact established itself firmly : a glimmer of sight had returned to his eyes. Only a glimmer it was ; not much more than enabled him to distinguish brilliant light from total darkness, and it strengthened little if at all. Nor did the consulted specialists hold out any prospect of its doing so. In compensation, they saw no reason to apprehend that it would again be extinguished. Honestly, indeed, they admitted that the case had puzzling features, and possibly their conjectural explanations may not have come much nearer the mark than Carrie's confident boast ascribing the improvement to her Tom's skill. After all, it was a condition which, supervening directly on his accident, would have been regarded by himself and everyone else as an almost unmitigated calamity. But now, following on those many rayless, hopeless years, it seemed a rudimentary miracle of healing, a release, a restoration. To those unlessoned by experience, its practical effects might appear to fall very far short of that. Sometimes it gave him an object towards which he could grope, and by which he could guide himself. Sometimes under rarely favourable conditions he could discern the outlines of a figure standing between him and a strong light. He prided himself much on having more than once recog-

nized the contour of Mio's head, and derived an incredible degree of gratification from being visually aware when he held up his own hand before his face. In fact, he found it advisable to guard against falling into the habit of repeating the experiment over often. And always, though prudence dared not build on it, there was the hope of even better things.

From the day of that wonderful discovery, indeed, might be dated the setting in of a generally hopeful period, busier and livelier, at Craiganogue. They had as much coming and going any week these times, it was observed in kitchen quarters, as there would be most whiles in a month of Sundays. Mrs. Fenlow, who paid one of her hurried visits, commented that they all seemed to be twenty-five per cent. more stirring than usual; but she added that they should not stir too energetically, lest they might bring the old walls and roof down about their ears, the dilapidations evidently remaining in *quid pro quo*. She often said that she picked up Latin quotations from her clever son. The most visible signs of activity were the draining operations, which Jack had promptly set about in the rushy field. He toiled there indefatigably, late and early, with spade and pick, and was presently joined in his labours by his father, whose interest in the work developed daily. They would come in of an evening as earthy as a couple of navvies, and their talk was of pipes and tiles, and the number of yards yet to be dug and trenched. The other people's talk turned on matters more serious and less immediately present. Not that Alfred proposed or allowed his elders to contemplate any remote future for the carrying out of the plans he had most at heart. His brilliant career at Woolwich, and the nature of his special attainments, made it certain that he would shortly be offered a post in connection with a great London laboratory. Where-

upon, he argued, Mio and he should be married, without further delay, for which there was no imaginable reason. He utterly declined to admit as such the circumstance that he had not yet come of age; he could not see that it would make any difference whether he ever did or didn't. They would live in London, or near it, where the Captain could have lots of music, and Mio the very best violin lessons. And in the holidays they might travel—to Paris, perhaps, where there would be more music, with the Conservatoire and fine opportunities for Mio's studies; or they might go further afield. There was that oculist fellow at Valmaville, whom it would be well to look up. And suppose that appointment were not made quite so soon as they expected, it might be very good for the Captain if they wintered abroad somewhere—say, in the south of France or Italy, the Banatie and all—it would be uncommonly jolly. A pleasure in itself, the discussion of these plans was carried on diligently, so that under it they were shaped and modified into more definiteness and feasibility while the radiant summer weather changed its name from June to July.

As they evolved themselves they came to comprise the sale of Drumatin to land-hungry Timothy Magrath. It was effected with dispatch, and proved the nearest way of dislodging the Hill-Clarks, naturally loth to relinquish what they had with so much alacrity grasped. Naturally, too, Mr. Hill-Clarke addressed the usurping heir in many acrimonious business letters, from which could be gathered that although he knew he had no case at law, he calculated on finding his account rather in inspiring terror than pity. Vi wrote also, more discursively, and, as a rule, to Flossie. She would have described herself as being "black out" with most of the party at Craiganogue; still, that she was more aggrieved than grieved by her expulsion from Drumatin is a view

not inconsistent with the following extract from her correspondence :

"To tell you the truth," she wrote, "I am not sorry to find myself back here at Vale Mount ; at all events, if one was to have been stuck perpetually in that ruinous, dismal old hole of a place. I am sure I hope that the man who bought it will like the state of the house ; but as he is a farmer, I suppose he does not care what sort of a pig-stye he lives in. Of course, that doesn't make it an atom less mean and contemptible of Captain Delaney to take it, when he had no right to it whatever, and Gilbert had always looked on it as as good as his, once the old Maddens were gone. I daresay it was that odious Alfred Armitage, or whoever he is, that put his father up to it, for he can't know much about business or anything himself—and Jack is as bad as either of them. As for the fifty pounds or so a year that they are making such a flourish of trumpets about letting us have, Gilbert says a hundred was the very least they could have done with any pretence of common honesty, and he had a great mind to bid them keep it for their washing or something. But that would be nonsense. Fifty pounds often comes in handy ; he might let me have it for my clothes."

This letter was in reply to one in which she had been told of Carrie's engagement ; she saw fit, however, to make only casual reference to the news in a concluding paragraph :

"I suppose," she wrote, "Dr. Fitzsimmonds is that absurd little giggling idiot at the Dispensary—I had forgotten his name ; it sounds highly aristocratic. My goodness, what a match !!! I would rather marry a

chimney sweep than a dispensary doctor. But, of course, poor Carrie was never likely to have any choice, and now being such a size makes her look older than she is. I am sure nobody would think she was seven or eight years younger than me; she might be thirty. And she is growing the very image of old Aunt Sophy. Of course, he hasn't a farthing"—with which she dismissed the subject.

Though Carrie insisted upon reading these comments, she was in such high good humour that they really affected her but little. She merely remarked: "I knew she'd be furious at the idea of anybody getting married except herself. I hope that somebody'll soon turn up for you, Flossie, and then she'll have no opportunities left for giving herself airs. Mercy on us, why can't she be content with her charming old land-agent without abusing other people? Don't you think he looks like a person who might be travelling in margarine, or some other greasy stuff? He has that sort of shiny smirk. . . . Tom an idiot, indeed! Just wait till he's oculist to the King."

The likelihood of this distinction was suggested to her by the fact that vastly magnified reports of Captain Delaney's cure circulated through the neighbourhood had brought to Dr. Fitzsimon, despite his constant disclaimers, a small concourse of patients suffering from eye-trouble; and that as simple faith in some cases, and a simple lotion in others, had proved beneficial, the first beginnings of a reputation might be considered discernible.

Mio, who was sitting near, said, to give things an agreeable turn: "I daresay Doctor Fitzsimon would have cured poor Larry Fahy's rheumatism, so that he needn't have gone off to those boiling baths." For Larry had been sent in quest of "soopleness" to Droitwich.

"Of course he would," Carrie affirmed complacently, handing back Flossie's letter. "But we needn't bother our heads about Vi's nonsense. I'm sure it would take a great deal more than that, Mio, to make you and me think we aren't very lucky."

"It would, indeed," Mio said; "all the nonsense in the world."

"And more, too," said Carrie defiantly.

CHAPTER XXI

MORE came within a few days. One August morning, peaceful of aspect, brought tidings that war had broken out—"and all the world was in the sea." Its first lapping and swirling round the Craiganogue household, as many another, scattered apart and flung together, swept some away, and left a remnant huddled within a narrower circle. On an early day Jack, having read the newspaper, said: "I'm a fairly good shot, and can ride; I'm going to enlist;" and he did so without delay. Setting him a bit on his road, Charlie Quin said more than half seriously: "Who knows that I mayn't be off after you yet? I'm nothing to speak of over my half century, and as fit as a fiddler; those drainage works of yours have made me as hard as nails, and I don't see how I could put in the time better till we got back to finish them. After a while the authorities mayn't be over-particular about the age of an able-bodied man, and then I might try my chance." In the meantime he got employment connected with remounts which often took him on journeys through the county of Mayo.

Alfred successfully applied for a commission, instead of the appointment which he had had in view. Nobody now gainsaid him when he insisted on a wedding before he went out. It was merely because he thought that Mrs. Armitage-Delaney would be a more responsible

and awe-inspiring person to leave in charge of the Captain, Mrs. Armitage declared. At some self-sacrifice she had enforced Alfred's resumption of his father's name. "It will come to honour, we shall see," she predicted to the Captain, "and I'll not usurp any of the glory—no, not by so much as a hyphen." Since Carrie and her Tom were to be married as soon as they could find a suitable dwelling, and Gerald was absent at St. Agatha's College, Mrs. Quin and Flossie seemed likely to have only one another's company at Craiganogue. However, there appeared a prospect of a neighbouring locum tenancy for the theological student upon his ordination in November; so it was decided that he and Louie Hannay should lengthen the list of that season's family alliances, and take up their abode with his mother and sister. The arrangement promised well, for Flossie and Louie were kindred spirits, who found much solace in needlework, and in remarking that every little helps; while Mrs. Quin could deem herself happy in retaining under her wing her favourite son. Mio and Captain Delaney and Mrs. Armitage were going to London, a step which they viewed chiefly as a means of bringing them a stage nearer news from the front.

Thus many changes, entailing dispersion and shrinkage, had come to impend over the household at Craiganogue. But on the day before Mio's wedding they had all drifted together again, for the last time, much as they had been when the floods broke loose. It was an October afternoon, full of serene and steady sunshine; there were pale blue mists in the hollows of the hills, and no sounds borne on the still air except the hum of a distant threshing-machine, which seemed to blend with an odour of burning potato stalks. Charlie Quin and his wife, the three engaged couples, Mrs. Armitage and Captain Delaney, Flossie and Jack, were all out on a south-westward-

looking lawn, not a compact group, yet all caught under the same glow of shrubbery-bounded sunshine, and all more or less within speaking range of one another, as they sat on rustic bench or primitive bank. And more or less round them all hung the atmosphere of the last time. With one exception, those to whom it was most perceptible avoided as much as might be looking into the future; they were restricted, therefore, in conversing to two dimensions of Time, and their talk flowed rather intermittently. The one exception was Private John Quin, who, his three days' leave having nearly expired, would be travelling to Queenstown that night, and soon afterwards voyaging overseas. His countenance expressed alert, even eager interest in some prospect not actually before his eyes, but he did not take much part in the conversation, sitting a little aloof where a mountain-ash shook its shadows down on the grass bank. He had got into the background partly to watch the others, or some of them, and partly to elude observation, because his appearance in khaki, being the first visible portent of the war there beheld, had drawn upon him notice from which he instinctively shrank. Had not old Nurse Lee stepped over that morning to assail him with voluble admiration, only tempered by disapproval of his going for "a common soldier, the same as Nicholas O'Hara and Andy Flynn." Now as he sat in the spangled shade, he seemed to have put on an exaggeration of the earthiness acquired during his interrupted digging; and Flossie, knitting a brown sock opposite, might have dipped her yarn in the peaty water of a black-mouthed bog-hole.

Her mother and Louie Hannay were knitting, too, and animadverting on the splittiness of wool, and the brittleness of ivory needles. Nobody talked seriously or sentimentally, because it would have seemed like wading

into indefinitely deep water; everybody found some difficulty in skimming light-heartedly over the surface of things; even the most solid-seeing commonplace and matter-of-course betrayed here and there a certain warning hollowness under foot, which brought conversation to a standstill. This being so, small incidental humours and absurdities were made the most of at the time, and afterwards incongruously associated with it in permanent remembrance.

Unexpectedly there arrived a neighbouring acquaintance, one Oliver Reid, youngish, sportsmanish in attire, with a black pointer slinking behind him. His mission was mainly to inform Jack Quin of a coursing meeting up on Kilboyne bog next day, and to urge his attendance, as also Mr. Delaney's. At the sight of Jack in uniform he strongly protested: "Oh, I say, are you going in for that sort of thing? Now I should call it perfectly rotten, in the middle of the shooting, and hunting just beginning. I must say I'm surprised at the lots of fellows that seem to be taking to it. But, anyhow, you might get a day to-morrow. I was up there myself last week, and the place was hopping with hares; the dogs were chivying them about like tame cats."

"I'm due in Queenstown at nine a.m.," said Jack.

"Rotten! And is your friend going off, too?" said Mr. Reid.

"I hope to be very soon," said Lieutenant Delaney. "And I have an engagement to-morrow, in any case."

"Well now, if you want to know my opinion," said Mr. Reid, "I think it's a very great mistake, letting everything go to the deuce that way. What's to become of the Hunt, unless people continue their subscriptions? And what's to become of the country if we don't do anything to keep up the breed of horses and dogs?"

"To keep down the breed of Huns seems more to the purpose just at present," said Jack.

"Ditto," said Alfred.

"I'm told it will be positively filthy in the trenches," Mr. Reid said, shifting his ground. "You'll be standing up to your knees in mud half the time. And into trenches they're sure to get."

Jack suggested the expedient of standing on his head occasionally for a change. But Mr. Reid withdrew in solemn disapproval. "Infernal asses the pair of bounders are making of themselves," he said, when he told a waiting friend the result of his errand, "going on with such antics!" Later on, however, he himself became an energetic member of the local Recruiting Committee.

"There's a seat here, Jack," Mrs. Armitage said, as he was passing her on his return from doing escort duty by Mr. Reid. Her mind was rather perturbed about Jack, for whom she had always had a liking, though, as she now half remorsefully remembered, it had sometimes been crossed by jealous apprehensions lest he should become an obstacle to her own lad's wishes. Now she said to herself that Jack seemed to be out of it all, sadly in one sense, gladly in another; and she thought she would like to ascertain whether positive happiness as well as relief had any part in his mood. Almost her first glance at him as he seated himself beside her assured her that it had. Not only was he set up physically by his drilling and training, but he had an air of looking forward with unmistakable elation. She said to him brilliantly: "You're going to have a pleasant night for your travels; not cold, as it so often is in this month."

"Oh, first-rate," he said; "it couldn't be better."

"Jack's rather horrid," Flossie said, looking up from the heel of her sock. "He's quite pleased to be setting

off, and doesn't mind missing the wedding. I'm sure he could have got another day's leave."

"Ah, in these days one isn't much in the humour for weddings or any other festivities," said Mrs. Armitage. "Do you get your wool from Wales?"

"Oh, yes, of course it is nothing of a wedding at all, really," said Flossie, "no bridesmaids or anything." Quiet, indeed, it was to be, with the most meagre crescent of a honeymoon. "Only he might have liked to see Mio married, one would think. But he'd rather be starting, though it must seem queer not to know where one's going to." And she reverted to her sock.

"Well, I wish you good luck there and back," Mrs. Armitage said, "wherever it may be."

"If I didn't turn up to finish our bit of digging," Jack said, glancing round to see that his father was not within earshot, "it would be a disappointment."

"You won't spend your life at that," said Mrs. Armitage; "one never can tell what there is round the corner."

"It isn't too bad a job, anyhow," Jack said resolutely.

"Perhaps I might go out, too, if I could find any sort of a job," said Mrs. Armitage. "I'm superannuated for training as a nurse, besides having a tendency to regard sick people with alarmed aversion, which might be a drawback; but other useful employments may develop themselves."

"There you are planning evil, Banatie," said Alfred, who stood at her left hand, and looked across to where Mio and the Captain, under a twinkling laurel, were winding a skein. "You know very well that you will be wanted to keep an eye on those two. And what more useful could you be doing?" He put the question quite seriously.

"I wonder how many people you would like to leave in charge of them?" Mrs. Armitage said, with sarcasm which lost its edge in a suppressed sigh.

"I'll be very fairly content with you and Larry Fahy," said Alfred. "A bad shot, Mio!" For she had tossed the woollen ball over to Flossie with so inaccurate an aim that it fell and rolled wide of its mark. She ran after it herself, as did three or four people; but it was Jack who picked it up and handed it to her. A very small service, a very small success, still Mio's looking so disproportionately grateful for the one made him think more of the other, so conjectured Mrs. Armitage, a spectator somewhat chagrined, who likewise laid undue stress on the little incident. However, she further reflected that a person cannot be held accountable for possessing only a pair of darkly pathetic eyes wherewith to express her most trivial sentiment, and again that another person with a campaign in a World War before him was favourably situated as to chances of freeing himself from the memory of vain desires. On these meditations broke the voice of Louie Hannay, who, struck by the drawing together of the scattered group, suddenly exclaimed: "What a large party we are! Why, let me see . . . there would be twelve of us, if Carrie and Doctor Fitzsimon were in sight, and they're only just round that corner. Dear me! I wonder where we'll all be this day next year? How funny it would be if we knew!"

"*Funny*, Louie—is that the word?" Gerald admonished her reprovingly, and she fell silent, abashed, but nobody else had overheard him.

"A year is much too far ahead to look for fun," said Mrs. Armitage. "And guessing riddles without an answer is a stupid sort of amusement to my mind."

"I daresay there'll be lots of fun at the end of it,

though," said Alfred, "and before that, too, which is at least a harmless guess."

"All the same, I would rather not be asked any," Mrs. Armitage persisted. "And if I were a prophet, I should earnestly desire to disbelieve in myself."

"Banatie," said Mio, who had slipped into a vacant place between her and Jack, "do you ever get badly frightened when you think about things?"

"To be sure I do, dear child, like all the rest of the world. Everybody's subject to fits of panic these times, very naturally," said Mrs. Armitage. "But, luckily, many of them will find that they've been frightened about nothing—that concerns them particularly."

Mio's question, put in an undertone, had been scarcely heard at all by Jack, and the reply but partially, so that he inferred their purport from Mio's countenance, which seemed to him piteous and disappointed of obtaining much consolation. Whereupon he said: "Perhaps the best plan is to keep the notion in your mind that there may be a sort of general Decency at the back of things that will make them all right for everybody in the end. It sets a limit to your worries in any particular direction—stops them up from running on indefinitely. At least, that's my experience," Jack propounded his philosophical theories with a very great effort, actuated by a hope that they might contain a scrap of encouragement.

"It is a modest creed, and yet
Pleasant if one considers it,"

Mrs. Armitage quoted.

"I'm very much of your opinion, Jack," said Alfred, "and do you know, absurdly enough, I find that the artistic convention of representing the Supreme Being as a rather morose-countenanced old man with a long beard, seated on feather-bed clouds, does really increase

the difficulty of keeping hold on a more rational idea. I suppose some picture put it firmly into my head in the days of my youth."

"Much worse things than that were put into *my* head," said Mio, with a reminiscence of her studies in the book-room.

"Probably I was luckier in that respect," said Alfred, "being kept out of the way of Sunday schools, and other places where men grotesquely talk."

There was an abrupt uprising close at hand of a semi-clerical figure, as Gerald jumped to his feet. "I declare I think you're all very irreverent," he said wrathfully, and went off, disappearing among the shrubs with a protesting flounce.

"You see, he's awfully keen on Sunday schools and such things just now, and makes a personal matter of them; it's like poor Reid and his hares and patriotic sport," Jack said apologetically, and Alfred, in his turn, confessed: "I'd quite forgotten that he was there."

But Louie slipped away after her fiancé, whose ruffled feelings she soothed by the expression of sympathetic disapproval, and especially by the recital of some religious verse with the refrain: "Our God's quick-marching on," calmed and cheered by which they rejoined their profaner companions upon the arrival of afternoon tea.

Larry Fahy made it his business to assist in bringing out the tables. "I suppose this is the last time that we'll have it—out of doors," Mrs. Quin said, with a sorrowful glance round her. On the declaration of war he had precipitately quitted Droitwich, cured partly by brine and partly by excitement. His spirits, sorely cast down by his rejection as physically unfit for military service, were only in a measure restored by Alfred's assurance that he himself would now go with a heart and twice a half, leaving Mrs. Delaney and the Captain in guardianship so

efficient. Nevertheless, Larry was clearly resolved on discharging the duties of his post with thoroughness as well as zeal. "For one thing, your Honour," he said, when talking matters over, "I'll do me endeavours to put Miss Mio off playing the Captain any of them dirgey, dolesome miseries on the little fiddle, for the length of time that you're abroad. A few tunes she has that might set the fairies jigging to dance their feet dry, stepping out of the heavy dew; and there's no harm in that sort; but there's other high keening ones, that's like nothing unless a banshee letting on to be singing instead of crying, and we'll give *them* a rest, if I can contrive it."

Other sources of consolation were not wanting. Alfred's recognition and reinstatement pleased him mightily. The rout of the Hill-Clarks from Drumatin he viewed with unqualified satisfaction, dividing the credit of the exploit between himself and Carrie, whose promptitude and audacity he sincerely admired. When at Craignogue, indeed, he sometimes became over-outspoken on the subject for his surroundings, oblivious of the fact that he was among near family connections of the persons whom he described as "a pair of born grabbers; it would be hard to say which, he or she, would make the longest arm after the meanest handful." But he rejoiced most of all at the Captain's glimmer of eyesight, on which he built up very impossible hopes. In his sweet deluding daydreams, he and the Captain, "as sound as a couple of prize-bulls," were always together in the hottest corner of the grandest fight, accounting to heart's desire for Huns by the dozen and score. That was his vision of true Paradise, from which he could not bring himself to believe that he must be shut out for all his earthly span.

In that sheltered bay of the lawn, a bowlful of mellow sunshine, with beyond its screening bushes nothing to

be seen or heard except blue mist and a droning hum, war seemed remote enough, and Paradise far to seek. The light twinkled on the knitters' needles and on the tea-drinkers' spoons. Cups clattered, and people laughed at the household jester Trap, a blue-coated terrier, who begged round the circle with eyes and ears irresistibly cocked. Jack's martial array was the only visible sign of what yet lay uppermost in their minds with few exceptions—Gerald and Louie, Tom Fitzsimon and Carrie; but even Carrie gave many a rueful thought to the going of Jack. It might have been noticed that Charlie Quin took his tea without sugar, and ate no cake; his purpose was to rejuvenate himself by hard training, and he felt as if these small acts of abstinence were little steps on the way towards following his son. Mio knew part of the reason why Jack went so eagerly, and she grieved much because of a lifelong friendship. As the time for his departure drew nearer, talk grew more intermittent, and subject to fitful silences. Through one of these pauses there came quaveringly by a bugle call of somewhat uncertain sound.

"Now what would that set itself up to be, sir, at all?" scoffed Larry Fahy, who was helping the Captain on with his overcoat. "Is it the old engine letting off steam, or was it a curlew on the bog?"

"It wasn't so bad as all that, you know," said Captain Delaney. "I suppose it's from a camp of Volunteers that's been lately established at Loughshandra." The notes, long unheard, had brought more vividly before him his own dream of Paradise, which was not essentially unlike Larry's, with the difference that he looked into it out of the dark. To think unenvyingly of Jack was at the moment the most he could do, with an effort that seemed to leave him no energy for captious criticism.

"Their bugler has reason to be proud of himself,"

Larry persisted in his alleviating scorn, "if that's the best offer he can make at it. He might be shaking it out of the holes in an old sack."

"He'll have improved all right, no fear, before he gets out to the front," said Alfred.

"Please goodness," Mrs. Quin said hopefully, "the whole horrible war may be over by that time."

"Lots of things will have been improved when it is," said Jack.

"Off the face of the earth some of them—too many——" Mrs. Armitage said, and stopped, because she found herself beginning to think aloud.

"It mustn't end until it can never begin again," said Mio, "never again."

"That's a very long look out, Miss Mio," said Charlie Quin.

"It may be; but, all the same," she said, with the conviction of one who had honestly counted the utmost cost that could fall upon herself, "it will be worth while."

So, like many a thousand households on that day, and in after days, they "tired the sun with talking"—nowise brilliantly—"and sent him down the sky," knowing that he would rise for them on a world of changed aspect. Nobody can say whether they had the better lot who went, or who were left behind. In fact, nobody will wisely go out of his way to make assertions about anything on the face of this distraught and bewildered earth, whence Peace has fled, not to return until men, waking up sane as from a frenzied nightmare, shall have builded her a habitation for ever.

THE END

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.

are pleased to announce Novels for the Spring of 1917 by the following
LEADING AUTHORS, particulars of which will be found in the ensuing pages

ETHEL M. DELL
Baroness ORCZY
H. de VERE STACPOOLE
Baroness von HUTTEN
M. P. WILLCOCKS
DOUGLAS SLADEN
BERTA RUCK
DOROTHEA CONYERS
W. E. NORRIS
MARIAN BOWER
H. B. SOMERVILLE
ISABEL C. CLARKE
F. FRANKFORT MOORE
CURTIS YORKE
G. B. BURGIN
CECILIA HILL
JANE BARLOW
M. BERESFORD RYLEY
KATHLYN RHODES
EDGAR JEPSON
GABRIELLE VALLINGS
MARJORIE DOUIE
HELEN PROTHERO LEWIS
F. BANCROFT
EDGAR WILLIAM DYNES

New 6s. Novels

The Mark of Vraye

By H. B. SOMERVILLE

Author of "Ashes of Vengeance" (4th Edition), etc.

The scenes of this story are laid chiefly in Brittany at the end of the fifteenth century ; and it deals with conflicts, both of wills and weapons, which arise from marriage by trickery of a Breton lady, Yvonne de Vraye, to her family's most bitter enemy and the murderer of her brother. It also introduces the plots of the Breton nobles to depose Pierre Landais from his high position in the Court of hautes as the chief favourite of the last Duke of Brittany.

The Deep Heart

By ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "The Lamp of Destiny," etc.

The background of Miss Clarke's new novel is Italy, and in the hands of one who is so sensible to the beauties of that country nothing could be more appropriate. Like her other books, it is a Catholic story, beautifully told in her limpid flowing language with which her readers are familiar.

Avril Waring has never known any other house than the charming villa overlooking Naples, where she lives till her twentieth year, when her mother's death makes it necessary that she should sell it. The place is bought by Justin, a young man who has recently come into a fortune, and who is determined to enjoy his life to the full. Without disclosing the main theme of the story, we may say that Justin's selfish course of life deeply affects Avril, but how he is at last brought to a sense of the worthlessness of his life is related with rare skill and feeling.

New 6s. Novels

The Hundredth Chance

By **ETHEL M. DELL**

Author of "The Bars of Iron."

A new and very long novel by the Author of "The Way of an Eagle" and "The Bars of Iron," of which 48,000 copies of the latter have already been sold in its original form.

The Bridge of Kisses

By **BERTA RUCK**

Author of "His Official Fiancée," (15th Edition),

"The Girls at His Billet," etc.

"Men and women do jar upon each other so with the differences in their ways, that one thinks they must have been meant to live in separate worlds. A gulf yawns between them. There's only one bridge that can span that gap—Love: the Bridge of Kisses!"

This is the story of the building of two bridges—one by the hero, a young Engineer-officer, and one by the heroine, an ingenuous girl, who has undertaken to find him a wife during the six weeks that he is billeted in her neighbourhood.

New 6s. Novels

Grace Lorraine

By **DOUGLAS SLADEN**

Author of "The Tragedy of the Pyramids."

The scene is laid on the lofty coast of South Devon, where a Squire, who lost his fortune in the War, had founded a fellowship of poor authors, artists and musicians, in the restored mediæval monastery of Via Pacis, and the American millionaire who purchased his property and built a copy of Taormina on it. It is a strong love story, packed with exciting incidents as Mr. Sladen's stories always are. The millionaire, a rugged Westerner, and the Rector's grandson, who has been the idol of Rugby and Oxford, and goes to fight in France, are both of them in love with Grace Lorraine, the beautiful daughter of the Squire. Her decision and Roger's fate form the crux of the book.

In Mio's Youth

By **JANE BARLOW**

Author of "Irish Neighbours," etc.

A natural and convincing Irish story by a familiar pen. Like all Miss Barlow's novels, the characterization is particularly good.

A New Novel

By **KATHLYN RHODES**

Author of "The Lure of the Desert" (6th Edition)

Captain Moody, having been wounded in France, goes to Cornwall to spend three months' leave alone with his young wife. Instead of the peace he expects, he is involved, through the agency of a woman, in strange and devastating happenings which lead perilously near to tragedy. Largely, however, through the wisdom of Deniss, his wife, the tragedy is averted, and the bridge which leads from disaster to security is safely negotiated.

New 6s. Novels.

A Sheaf of Bluebells

By **BARONESS ORCZY**

In this long and fascinating romance we read of the intrigues that are necessary for Madame la Marquise de Mortain to employ in her endeavour to control her son and to stop his factory for the making of arms. The manner in which this intricate plot is worked out is worthy of the author of "The Elusive Pimpernel"; and for sustained interest and for situations that will hold the reader in breathless excitement, "A Sheaf of Bluebells" bears a resemblance to Baroness Orczy's greatest novel, now in its 314th thousand.

The Experiments of Ganymede Bunn

By **DOROTHEA CONYERS**

Author of "The Strayings of Sandy" (15th Edition), etc.

The hero of this story, Ganymede Bunn, was formerly a clerk in a London store, when he receives an unexpected bequest from an aunt. He has always longed to ride and live in the country, and he resolves to speculate his capital in horses with a view to increasing his inheritance. He goes over to Ireland, where he makes plenty of good friends, notwithstanding his odd language and other peculiarities, and he falls in love. His relatives try, but are not successful in their endeavours, to prove him mad.

New 6s. Novels.

The Head Man

By F. BANCROFT

Author of "The Veldt Dwellers," etc.

Like the earlier novels by this writer, the present book is a convincing story of South African life. It is a fragment of life as it was and is lived in that country, the space of time covered in the narrative being considerable. The story, which opens shortly after the Boer war and closes with the annexation of South-West Africa in the present war, deals with the fortunes of a family. The young English widow of a Boer farmer in her need makes the desperate bargain with a Boer that he is to work as her partner for ten years, and her daughter, who will at the expiration of that period be seventeen, is to be his wife. What is the result of this compact must be left to the author to tell, but the end is not reached without many exciting complications.

The Love Story of Guillaume-Marc

By MARIAN BOWER

Author of "Skipper Anne," etc.

This romance is fresh, original and dramatic in the simple presentation of the great truths of life and love. There is colour, vivacity and atmosphere in it. The love story is exceptionally interesting.

Tumult

By GABRIELLE VALLINGS

Author of "Bindweed" (4th Edition)

This novel, by the author of "Bindweed," now in its fourth large edition, is a picture of modern French social life in Paris and on the Riviera, and the love story of a young Countess of Franco-Australian parentage. It deals with social and artistic circles in France, and incidentally with life in the Australian bush. It depicts the struggle between Ancient Vitality—as a revival of the Classic and Primitive—embodied by the god Pan, and the Modern Vitality embodied in the Futurist movement and Ultra-Modernist thought.

New 6s. Novels.

In Blue Waters

By H. de VERE STACPOOLE

In "In Blue Waters," as in "The Blue Horizon," Mr. Stacpoole shows us not only the beauty and terror of the tropics, but the humour and tragedy of the sea. The humour of the sailor-man in his hands never becomes farcical, and he has discovered the fact that every ship has its own personality and character. Billy Harman, of "The Blue Horizon," steps again into the pages of "In Blue Waters," where this quaint and companionable scamp has sea dealings almost as extraordinary as those of Captain Slocum with his "Luck."

"In Blue Waters," like "The Blue Lagoon," is a big sunlit book, a tonic book, full of the freshness of the sea.

The Eyes of the Blind

By M. P. WILLCOCKS

Author of "Change," "The Wings of Desire,"
"The Power Behind," etc.

Miss Willcocks' new novel is the story of one who regained his eyesight after an operation with most disconcerting results. We are often told that it is folly to be wise if ignorance is bliss. In this novel we are asked whether, if blindness means happiness, one should therefore shrink from the light. It is a story more intense in its drama than her recent books, since, like "Wings of Desire," it deals mainly with West Country types, and, like "The Wingless Victory," it is a novel of temptation and of the love that conquered after a hard fight. Miss Willcocks has gone back to the old simple things that are as old as man and woman, though here, too, there is the interest of opposing social and religious atmospheres, and here again many of the "saints" are but whited sepulchres.

New 6s. Novels.

The Citadel

By **CECILIA HILL**

With an Introduction by **EMILE CAMMAERTS**

The story opens with the schooldays of Catherine Buckland at the old Belgian town of Dinant, the Citadel of which, in its dominating position, is impressed potently on her consciousness. In England she meets two men, who are friends, and who are both attracted by her. She becomes engaged to one of them, a devout Catholic, and whose mother is a fanatical one. She had vowed her son to the priesthood, but he turns his back on it, though in his heart he had heard the call. Later, the call comes again. The closing scenes are in Dinant, and a remarkably convincing description is given of the siege and sack of the town by the Huns. The novel is noteworthy for its fine feminine quality and charm, and for its interesting and natural characters.

She Who Meant Well

By **CURTIS YORKE**

Author of "Disentangled," "Her Measure," etc.

The story of a man and a woman who, owing to the well-meant misrepresentations of the man's sister, married under the impression that each was in love with the other. The man was an invalid, and the girl married him out of pity; he married her to give her a home. A dramatic incident leads to the man's recovery, and they are becoming really attached to one another when they accidentally find out how they have been deceived. There are various carefully drawn minor characters, and the story holds the interest from first to last. It is one of the best the author has written, and will increase her world-wide popularity.

New 6s. Novels.

The Fall of Raymond

By F. FRANKFORT MOORE

Author of "The Rise of Raymond," etc.

Mr. F. Frankfort Moore's new novel concerns the progress—up to a certain point—of Raymond Monk, who, after passing with distinction through the English schools of music, goes to Italy to study for grand opera under a famous but eccentric *maestro*. He has been engaged to a charming English girl and remains faithful to her, in spite of the many temptations which surround a young and promising tenor, until a moment comes when his ambition to achieve a great career causes him to be blind to every other consideration. Happily, he recovers his sight and balance before it is too late. The means by which this is accomplished constitutes the greater part of the story; and it is made plain that when Raymond falls it is not "like Lucifer, never to rise again." The sketches of the *personnel* of the opera company with which the hero is associated will be found equal to the best of the author's work.

The Peepshow

By HELEN PROTHERO LEWIS

(Mrs. JAMES J. G. PUGH)

Author of "Love and the Whirlwind," etc.

This highly humorous book purports to be a memoir, and is written in autobiographical style by a young girl—Griselda Lovejoy, who is remarkably ingenuous, and has been adopted by an Earl. Her blunders create extraordinary situations. All the characters, we are told, are living people with fictitious names. Hilaria, the Earl's American wife, is delightful. She sympathizes with Griselda's secret love for the Earl's son, Lord Dwindle, and the way in which she manages her tempestuous husband and steers Griselda through her entanglements with the exclusive Sir John Sumpter-Mule and the democratic Mr. Washington Yanke, is most diverting. More than once tragedy draws near, but finally Griselda is steered into safety. The pictures of life, as led by our aristocrats, shown us in this "Peepshow," may not flatter Society, but will certainly entertain it.

New 6s. Novels.

The Professional Prince

By **EDGAR JEPSON**

Author of "The Night Hawk," etc.

Tells how a young Prince employs a double to take tiresome jobs off his hands. The complications close with the Prince's marriage to a charming Princess at the opening of war. Bletsoe, the Prince's accomplished valet and major-domo, is a very clever character. There is a light, deft touch in the handling of characters and situations, and the story increases in interest as it proceeds to a happy ending for the Prince.

Ma'am

By **M. BERESFORD RILEY**

A novel with a most charming heroine. The treatment is quite original, the style refined, and the story very human and interesting. The characters are not the stereotyped fiction puppets; they are all very much alive.

The Pointing Man

A Burmese Mystery

By **MARJORIE DOUIE**

This mystery story is concerned with the disappearance of Absalom, a little Christian boy, who is the assistant and the pet of a wealthy Burman, Mhtoon Pah, the keeper of a curio shop in Paradise Street, Mangadone. Besides Mhtoon's former friend, but now sworn enemy, Leh Shin, who is suspected regarding the boy's disappearance, there are several people belonging to the English colony, all of whom more or less are interested in solving the mystery. The intricate skein which envelops the boy's fate is very skilfully worked out in this most unusual and enthralling detective story, the Burmese background contributing to its interest and fascination.

New 6s. Novels.

Brown Amber

By **W. E. NORRIS**

Author of "Proud Peter" (4th Edition)

The brown amber which gives the title to the story is a bead of that somewhat unusual shade, reputed to have the gift of bringing a large measure of either good or ill fortune to its holder. In the opening chapter it is acquired from an itinerant vendor at Cairo by the hero, a young officer. By him it is bestowed upon a young lady who has lately become a widow, and with whom he has been upon terms which make him feel that he is bound in honour to marry her, should she expect what he himself has quite ceased to desire. This lady has other designs; yet she is not disposed to give the young man his liberty, and still less so when she discovers that he has fallen in love with a girl whom he cannot ask to marry him until he is set free. The story has the above situation for its pivot, and only reaches a satisfactory termination by means of divers events. In the course of these the amber passes through many vicissitudes, conferring good luck or the reverse by turns, until it finally finds its way back into the possession of the original purchaser.

Magpie

By **BARONESS VON HUTTEN**

Author of "Sharrow," "Pam," etc.

No living novelist has written such charming stories of children as the Baroness von Hutten. Who is there that, once having made the acquaintance in her pages of Pam, will deny her the most completely sympathetic knowledge of childhood, with its own strange and wistful outlook on the world. In the present book she tells the story of the child Mag Pye, the daughter of a gentleman, broken in fortune by his own failings, who has married a pantomime girl. How the child grows up in the Chelsea Workmen's Dwellings and how she fares, with her joys and sorrows, under her unworthy father's vicissitudes, is related in the author's most characteristic manner.

New 6s. Novels.

A Puller of Strings

By G. B. BURGIN

Author of "The Shutters of Silence," etc.

Mr. G. B. Burgin's forthcoming Canadian novel, "A Puller of Strings," is a powerful study of the harm a bad priest may do in his jealous attempts to counteract the work of a good one. Father Grondin is sent to Four Corners, and oppresses everybody until handsome Gaspardeau, "The Puller of Strings," who has made a large fortune in New York, appears on the scene and unobtrusively sets to work to put things right. The real heroes of the story, however, are the good old gaoler and his half-witted friend Minyette, who are turned away from the gaol owing to the intrigues of Father Grondin. The picture of their life in the primitive Bush and the subjugation of the all-conquering Gaspardeau by a charming habitant maiden, are told with a freshness and *verve* which one would imagine impossible in an author who is already responsible for some fifty or sixty novels.

The Prodigal of the Hills

By EDGAR WILLIAM DYNES

This is an uplifting novel of life in the North-West of Canada ; it is full of feeling and freshness.

The story is dramatic and strong, and shows how a young man away in the hills fought and won, and how the girl of the right sort stuck to him ; all the characters have the throb of real life in them.

The Mixed Division

By R. W. CAMPBELL

Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 6/-

This book, by the author of "Private Spud-Tamson"—the work of a soldier and a Highlander—is a tribute to the spirit, patriotism and courage of the Territorials. "With sure and sympathetic touch, he reveals the bright side and the grey, the pathos and the tenderness, the simple heroism that knows but duty, the inspiration of *esprit de corps*, and the unforgettable horrors of Gallipoli, where the Territorials won for themselves undying fame. We congratulate the author and thank him for a book brimming with laughter that cheers, and with deeds that urge to emulation."

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